

DOCTORAL THESIS

Ruby: A Contemporary Re-interpretation of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

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Ruby: A Contemporary Re-interpretation of *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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Abstract

This study is a practice-based creative writing project with an accompanying thesis. It consists of *Ruby*, a work of poetry and prose, along with a thesis that seeks to contextualise it within literary poetics. *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam is the creative point of origin of *Ruby*. It is not a translation of *The Rubaiyat* in the traditional sense but rather a re-interpretation of the earlier text. Whilst *Ruby* heavily references *The Rubaiyat* in terms of content and narrative structure, it is an original piece of work set in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *Ruby* is strongly influenced by contemporary British and American poetry, and the references for the poem have partly been shifted to modern-day Britain. I have included a range of recognisable forms of “conventional” poetry, including quatrains, sonnets and haiku. However, there is also creative re-working and development using a variety of more experimental methods, through original poetic compositions, the use of “found material” (i.e. texts and images from other sources carefully placed for poetic effect) and via word montage. The result is a hybrid piece of work, which incorporates a variety of textual and visual forms. The thesis is divided into four chapters: the first is an introduction to the nature and aims of *Ruby*, and an overview of how it fits with other current research activity in the field of “poetic translation.” The second chapter explicates the format and structure of the creative piece, particularly its visual layout. The third chapter contains the text itself and a detailed critical commentary, which explores specific allusions in the text and how they connect the work to broader literary themes. The final chapter is a conclusion, exploring the implications of the poetics of *Ruby* to the subsequent treatment of re-interpretative translations of this kind.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Chapter One: Something Old, Something New	2
Chapter Two: This is “What It Is”	24
Chapter Three: “Ruby”	27
Chapter Four: Forging Omar Khayyam	182
<i>Ruby</i> vs. <i>The Rubaiyat</i> of Omar Khayyam – Table of Comparison	190
Bibliography	193

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Chapter One:

Something Old, Something New

Persian poetry has suffered badly from those who are determined to find an arbitrary mysticism in everything ... you would think there was nothing else than nightingales which are not birds, roses which are not flowers, and pretty boys who are God in disguise. (Bunting, in Pound 5)

Ruby is a contemporary reinterpretation of *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, which is a series of poems originally written in Persian and attributed to the poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam (1048–1131). A reinterpretation of a Middle Eastern text of this kind produces at least two distinct but inter-connected challenges. The first is to create a poetic re-working of the original that avoids the Orientalist cultural stereotypes often associated with Middle Eastern literature.ⁱ The second is to produce a new piece of work that is relevant to contemporary British culture and is integrated within a framework of contemporary poetics. Underlying both these challenges is the assertion that a re-interpretation of *The Rubaiyat* should do more than simply attempt to accurately translate its original representational ‘meanings’.ⁱⁱ Instead, the aim is to create a new piece of work connecting with a field of activity which Tim Atkins describes in *The Seven Types of Translation* (2011), as “translation as it is understood and practised by poets – poetic translation” (2). Poetic translation, according to Atkins, is the practice of using source texts as a springboard from which to write. In other words, this is a poetic process that is more concerned with the creativity of the translated piece than with preserving the authenticity of the original. Poetic translation

often uses foreign texts as sources for inspiration in the creation of new work, with varying degrees of fidelity of form or content to the original text.

These two inter-linked challenges, to reflect Middle Eastern culture whilst integrating with contemporary British and North American Poetics, require a delicate interplay between “the old” and “the new.” The old is represented by the original text, in this case *The Rubaiyat*, which is the inevitable starting point of this research, whilst the new is my contemporary response to it. Both of these challenges require a sophisticated treatment of the old, avoiding cultural clichés but providing a recognisable historical and literary context. Yet both also demand originality in the new – they require a creative act that Kent Johnson describes in his essay “Prosody and the Outside” as “an imaginative transformation of the original” (25).

In his preface to Omar Pound’s *Arabic and Persian Poems* (1970), Basil Bunting laments what he believes to be the poor state of Persian poetry in translation. Whilst he acknowledges the linguistic faithfulness of many translations of Persian verse, he is frustrated by the inability of these texts to reflect the cultural richness embedded in the original works. Too frequently, for instance, there is an over-emphasis on mystical allusions or naturalistic imagery. There is often, Bunting argues, no reflection of the subtleties and ambiguities of the original Persian works. These issues are compounded by an over-reliance on exotic or archaic language, which assigns the texts to being of historical interest rather than contemporary relevance. He contends that the workings of translation itself are at the heart of this predicament. Translation, in the conventional sense of the word, is usually based on the premise that an accurate transference of representational meaning is a primary purpose. Bunting, however, highlights that in the process of seeking accuracy in representational meaning, key aspects of Persian poetry

are being lost. He cites Hafez, for instance, whose work depends almost entirely on sound devices, literary references and contemporaneous cultural contexts – none of which are reflected in English translations. Bunting also gives the example of Manuchehri, who applies a variety of motifs and conceits in his poetry that are deliberately ambiguous and laced with multiple meanings. Translations of Manuchehri, Bunting contends, often focus on a single perspective (such as a specific school of Islamic philosophy) rather than highlighting the ambiguities of the language, therefore missing its more complex or nuanced philosophical positions (3).

In Omar Pound's *Arabic and Persian Poems*, Bunting finds a different approach, and one that is potentially a productive template for an alternative approach to the translation of Middle Eastern texts. For instance, in his translation of the twelfth-century Persian poet Anvari's "The Poet Politely Refuses," Pound explicitly avoids exotic depictions of the East:

Even gods would resent that paradise
a cottage with thrushes in the loft
and senior civil servants beg me back
to dine at Claridges
and view the dogs at Crufts (51).

With "The Poet Politely Refuses" Pound asserts the contemporary relevance of twelfth-century Persian literature by connecting it with twentieth-century English cultural references and poetics, and as a result creates something new and distinctive – something which transcends both traditions. In this respect, Pound takes a fundamental cue from the poetics of Charles Olson, and specifically his manifesto of writing, *Projective Verse* (1950). Amongst other things, the essay posits "a poem is energy

transferred from where the poet got it ... by way of the poem itself to, all the way, the reader” (1). Olson argues that through an animated application of the poetic line – a precise enactment of speech and the rhythms of breath - emerging forms of verse will be made to move, to become dramatic, lively, and filled with energy. He conceives the poem as a field of high energy (channeled through the poet into the written work received by readers) that must be in a constant state of movement and dynamic tension. Pound redeploys this notion of “energy” in *Arabic and Persian Poems* to the poetics of translation, where the enactments of speech and the rhythms of breath reflect both the original and new languages. The words and registers that emerge are filled with the dynamism of the interaction between the two languages, and this is much more important to Pound than achieving a high accuracy in representational meaning. In other words translation as it is practised in *Arabic and Persian Poems* is energy transferred rather than the conveyance of heavily proscriptive meaning from an original text.

In his introduction to Pound’s translations, Bunting actively encourages the creation of new texts that are crafted from older texts but which also deliberately seek to go beyond them. Bunting argues that responses of this kind would reveal the complexity and intricacy of earlier poetry, in a way that “conventional” translation, with its emphasis on representational fidelity, could not. He believes these new texts would search out parallels and juxtapositions between cultures, and working within a variety of contemporary literary forms, would enrich the literary landscape. Something old is given a fresh perspective and relevance by the production of something new, whilst something new is linked to a cultural framework that responds and is enriched by something old. Thus, as Pound himself argues in his preface to *Arabic and Persian Poems*, there is a “re-appraisal and re-discovery” of the older text (5), from which

something new emerges. It is through this process of “re-appraisal and re-discovery” that I came to create *Ruby*.

Bunting’s critique of the state of Persian poetry translation makes one important exception: the re-interpretation by Edward FitzGerald of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1858). Bunting acknowledges that FitzGerald’s treatment of *The Rubaiyat*, a series of “rub’i” or quatrains originally written in Persian during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, has been the only serious attempt to take Middle Eastern poetry beyond representational approaches. No creative re-appraisal of *The Rubaiyat* can ignore the contribution made by FitzGerald, whose translation is so intertwined with the original work that it is often playfully referred to as “The Rubaiyat Of FitzOmer” (Razavi 45). It was FitzGerald who first popularised *The Rubaiyat* in the West, and who produced the first widely available translation. Significantly, this version was not a straight copy of Khayyam’s work into English, but a creative re-working, starting with the original but overlaying FitzGerald’s own poetic devices and imagery. Indeed, FitzGerald’s literary skills flourished with the emancipatory power he experienced when working with a foreign-language text. For FitzGerald, it was more important to produce a persuasive and stimulating creative piece than to closely replicate the meaning of the original. In a letter to his friend Edward Cowell in 1859, FitzGerald stresses that “at all Cost, a [translation] must live: with a transfusion of one’s own worse Life if one cannot retain the Original’s better. Better to be a live Sparrow than a stuffed Eagle” (33).

At the heart of FitzGerald’s work is a belief that in order to reflect the key themes of the original, the translation would need to move away from a literal transference of words and phrases. FitzGerald consistently adapts the vocabulary of the original, and introduces his own imagery. Many of the verses are paraphrased, and some

of them cannot be confidently traced to any one of the Khayyam quatrains at all. In his letter to Cowell, FitzGerald himself refers to his version of *The Rubaiyat* as a “transmogrification” (34). He stresses that his translation would be of interest “for its form, and also in many respects in its detail: but very unliteral as it is, many quatrains are mashed together: and something is lost ... of Omar's simplicity, which is so much a virtue in him” (35). However FitzGerald also believes that this lack of fidelity offers him room to create afresh, and to re-engage with the original text in an altogether new way. As Charles Norton puts it in a review of *The Rubaiyat* in 1869, “FitzGerald’s translation is a work of poetry inspired by a poet, not a copy but a re-delivery of poetic inspiration for his own time” (577).

As with FitzGerald’s rendering, *Ruby* is a creative re-interpretation of *The Rubaiyat* that is in many ways a departure from the original. This is not a “straight translation” in any meaningful sense. In other words, fidelity to the original is not a primary objective. It is rather a re-invention of Khayyam’s work, and it is new poetry in its own right. It is also not a re-writing of FitzGerald’s work. Whilst FitzGerald has undoubtedly made a serious contribution to the field of poetic translation, with *Ruby* the process of “re-appraisal and re-discovery” continues. It connects with a contemporary cultural framework and applies new poetic forms that follow the conventions of neither Khayyam nor indeed FitzGerald. *Ruby* challenges attitudes to poetry in translation by reflecting and engaging with contemporary poetics. Whilst it is necessarily a re-invention of *The Rubaiyat*, it is also firmly grounded in contemporary poetry. A number of twentieth and twenty-first century writers have revisited foreign-language texts as a means of advancing poetic innovation, including Omar Pound himself with his *Arabic and Persian Poems*. Amongst contemporary writers, a broader quest for re-

interpretation can be found for instance in the work of Caroline Bergvall. In “Via”, first published and performed in 1998, Bergvall collects 48 translations of the opening tercet of Dante’s *Inferno*, and arranges them into a sequence based on a musical structure devised by her composer-collaborator Ciarán Maher. A common thread running between both “Via” and *Ruby* is this desire to “stand in” the original text, to ingest it and re-live it as part of contemporary poetics. Genevieve Kaplan, in her review of “Via” in *Jacket* magazine, argues that its narrator is not circling the rings of hell; instead he is trapped between the motives of self and world, learning the repercussions of sleep and inattention: “suffering the knowledge that ultimately one’s self is responsible for one’s predicament, Bergvall’s speaker finds that blaming the world will get him nowhere” (20). In common with “Via”, *Ruby* involves a process of assimilation and self-assignment based on the reconfiguring of an original older piece of poetry into something distinctly new and personally relevant. This is apparent in the very first section of *Ruby*:

omar is
 woken is
 re broke n
 for the un of it
 fitz and spits
 all iranned out (8).

Indeed whilst the first full page of *Ruby* is a re-working of the first quatrain (“awake...”) as it appears in FitzGerald’s translation (1), it is a deliberately subversive one. In stark contrast to the FitzGerald version, the language here is fragmented and its meanings are difficult to decipher. Also the birth motif in the FitzGerald quatrain is

laced with new images of fear and death, in order to highlight Khayyam's complex and fatalistic attitude to reaching middle age. Critically, the *Ruby* version re-centres the stanza on the reader: the "you" is the "broken un of it" or in other words the unresolved heart of the poetic narrative (5). As with "Via", *Ruby* prompts us to re-engage with the original text by becoming the subject of the poem. Both works thus highlight ways of acknowledging the influence of translation through models of ingestion, or assimilation, by our total absorption in the material. In this respect, it is possible to come to an understanding of the poetry by standing in it, by becoming part of it.

Throughout *Ruby* there is also a deliberate and considered process of de-familiarisation and re-orientation. The point of origin is something old and Oriental – a series of Persian quatrains that have become known as *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. These quatrains have been translated many times into English, most famously by FitzGerald, but never dramatically re-located to a Western setting. *Ruby* aims to re-discover Persian literature by populating it with Western poetic traditions, using a range of creative forms and poetic devices. *Ruby* places *The Rubaiyat* into settings that reflect the Persian contexts within which it was written, and then *re-replaces* these original contexts with Western, specifically British locations and cultural phenomena. The overall result is a re-orientation of the Orient, creating new and intimate connections between the older Persian and newer Western worlds which are embodied within the work through a process of disjunction. Disjunction, as it is used here, refers to a sense of dislocation, fragmentation and dysfunctionality. It also suggests a desire for reconnection, but in new and unexpected ways. This disjunction permeates the design and structure of *Ruby*, with a strange frameworking around sounds, an inconclusive and abstract narrative, and with a multi-directional perspective on place and time. It also

informs the styles, language, and speech registers that are used in the work.

Conventional punctuation is largely abandoned. Words and phrases are broken and left unfixed, or joined to neighbouring words in unnatural ways. Overall, the aim is to create a disruptive mood: making the known “rub up”, often uncomfortably, against the unknown. The agenda of this disjunction is to subvert stereotypes of Persian poetry; a rejection of mellifluously rhythmic styles and of sentimental or archaic language.ⁱⁱⁱ By undermining any complacencies or pre-conceptions of the language and form of *The Rubaiyat*, *Ruby* offers the possibility of with a new kind of orientation.

Underlying this formal procedural disjunction, there is also a deliberate and implicit cultural re-orientation in *Ruby*. The cultural context in which *The Rubaiyat* is often presented in academic and literary circles relates to a long-lost, or even imaginary Persia of Epicurean excess and exotic mysticism. As well as being a gross oversimplification of the philosophical positions of *The Rubaiyat*, these Orientalist associations seek to distance archaic Persia from modern-day Iran. The alluring romanticism of this imagined Khayyamian world is, by implication, detached from and perhaps even unachievable in the modern-day Middle East. As Edward Said points out in *Orientalism*, imaginary pasts such as this make a dialogue between cultures “fraught with difficulty” (78). The Orientalist cultural narrative presents the archaic Persian world as irrelevant and defunct, no more than a historical curiosity. However, by setting my text in the present, there is an opportunity to re-connect *The Rubaiyat* to a contemporary world that includes both Britain and Iran, and to reflect my own cultural orientation, as a Briton of Iranian extraction. There is dialogue in *Ruby* between the two cultural traditions, particularly through the heterogeneous exchange of words and speech registers that facilitate a shared framework of linguistic understanding. There is

also an exchange of ideas – connections are made between Western and Eastern mysticism, and there are competing and conversing voices representing, for instance, Islamism, Zionism, Marxism and Western Christianity.

In presenting multiple and often contradictory voices, *Ruby* offers alternatives to mainstream Orientalist interpretations of *The Rubaiyat*. In the notes to a conference held at the University of Cambridge on *The Rubaiyat* in 2009, published as part of the 2013 volume *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: Popularity and Neglect*, the word “Iran” is largely absent. Across the entire document, which lists the papers presented in the conference and their abstracts, “Iran” is only mentioned three times, and on two occasions in relation to an academic institution. Amin Razavi argues that the absence of Iran in *The Rubaiyat* is a deliberate political act by Western translators and publishers, a means of separating the benign and unthreatening beauty of Orientalist readings of Classical Persia from the perceived ugliness of a Modern Iran, with its associations with extremism and terrorism (216). Yet as Ali Behdad highlights in *Orientalism after Orientalism* (1994), an opportunity for dialogue is missed when such a one-dimensional approach is taken. Indeed dialogues such as those found in *Ruby* provide the potential to confront the “sense of historicism that develops around the mainstream, where the dominant tradition learns from and then discards other forms, in an inevitable growth in power through time” (122).

The disjunctive and experimental nature of *Ruby* reflects this rejection of mainstream preconceptions of Iranian culture by addressing aspects that are rarely associated with *The Rubaiyat*, such as the importance of mainstream Islamic thought on attitudes to mystical Persian poetry in modern-day Iran and the impact of migration to the West. In *Disjunctive Poetics* (1992), Peter Quartermain examines a number of

experimental writers whose work forms a counterpoint to the mainstream. Quartermain suggests that part of the reason for the explosion of experimental writing in America is linked to the political, social, and economic dislocation of non-English speaking immigrants who, bringing alternative culture with them, found themselves uprooted from their traditions and disassociated from their culture. The line of poetry that runs from Gertrude Stein through Louis Zukofsky and the Objectivists to the Language poets, Quartermain contends, is not constructive but deconstructive because it emphasises the materiality and ambiguity of the linguistic medium and the arbitrariness and openness of the creative process. Yet as Richard Gilbert argues in his essay “The Disjunctive Dragonfly” (2003) many non-English speaking immigrants challenge the mainstream not just by applying a disjunctive practice to their “original” culture, but also to their “new” one (7). By bringing together marginalised culture and language in both societies, a new opportunity for dialogue is created. In this respect, *Ruby* is a re-assertion of the Iranian-ness of *The Rubaiyat*, whilst at the same time asserting the Western-ness of *Ruby itself*, through my use of poetic forms that are heavily influenced by Olson, Bunting, Omar Pound and other twentieth century British and American poets.^{iv}

From the very beginning of *Ruby*, the objective is to create, address and challenge preconceptions about Persian poetry. For instance, the alternative title of the poem, *The Wine and Wisdom of Old Omar Khayyam (2014 UK Tour)*, is a playful take on the Orientalist presentation of *The Rubaiyat* in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In such readings, the poet-narrator is a Persian sage, an iconic image of the Middle Eastern mysticism. The title symbolises the pervasive cultural influence of this stereotype, an ever-present reference point for Western views of Middle Eastern culture,

which in the case of *The Rubaiyat* was largely introduced by FitzGerald. The intoxicated wise man is himself a manufactured hybrid, a synergy between the cultural iconography of the British poet and the Persian poet-philosopher. *Ruby* transplants cultures, at one point taking Omar Khayyam away from the wine taverns of twelfth-century Persia and inviting him to the private clubs of nineteenth-century Britain. I add to this mix of iconographies by introducing “2014 UK Tour” in parentheses – a pastiche of contemporary pop culture and a light-hearted reference to my contemporarisation and relocation of *The Rubaiyat* in modern-day Britain. As with FitzGerald’s *Rubaiyat*, I am “revisiting” Omar, applying my own interpretations, and placing him in a new setting that is in equal parts familiar and strange.

Ruby is structured around four frameworks of re-orientation which I have designed in order to provide a variety of means of navigation through the work. The first re-orientation involves the form of *Ruby*, which is significantly different in structure to the original *Rubaiyat*. Whilst Khayyam’s original contained quatrains assembled in sequence (the order of which varies by edition), *Ruby* is a series of pages of text, with each page containing four distinct pieces. The pages are assembled in a narrative sequence and there are four sequences, or “parts” overall. Whilst *The Rubaiyat* generally uses a single voice (the voice of an imagined Khayyam), *Ruby* contains multiple voices, some of which address the reader directly whilst others address Khayyam. Each voice has a specific tone and purpose in the narrative but nonetheless they all have a connection with *The Rubaiyat*. Some of these voices are incarnations of Khayyam himself whilst others act as a response to certain elements of *The Rubaiyat*. Towards the end of the first part, for instance, Khayyam is presented as a companion along a poetic journey: “pathways through it . you will be with / now and in the embers”

(44). The various voices also communicate with one another, either within a single page or across pages, creating a multiplicity of dialogues.

The second framework of re-orientation involves the sounds of *Ruby*, offering a reassuring if slightly dispossessing sense that there is something of value to discover from the tones and music of words, even if they are foreign or not fully understood. Voiceless phonemes are sometimes separated from their corresponding voiced ones, to new and perhaps unexpected associations. In other words, words are “re broke n” or “un furl e d” in order to reach “the un of it” (34). The velar fricative^v is initially absent, as is largely the case in Modern English, but as the narrative progresses it begins to re-assert itself and highlights a connecting point, or more specifically a connecting sound, between Middle Persian and Modern English. Gradually the sounds and rhythms of Persian are introduced into the English text until ultimately at the end of *Ruby*, the two languages are in communion with one another: “rub’i” becomes “ruby” (106), and “i am” becomes “xay am” (121). The overall effect is the reassembly of component sounds in new ways that embody natural breathing patterns. In this respect, *Ruby* takes a lead from the poetics of Charles Olson’s *Projective Verse* – specifically, Olson’s proposal that poetry should reflect the rhythms of natural breath and thought. Olson works through the ear, and his lines are breath-conditioned. The two halves, he says, are: “the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE/the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE” (2). In the case of *Ruby*, I redeploy Olson’s notion of natural breath to inform my translation poetics: the rhythms and sounds of Persian are juxtaposed and re-connected with those of English. I call this the projective transfer of verse between cultures, or “projective transverse”, a concept which I review in more depth in Chapter 4.

The third re-orientation revolves around the multiple and ambiguous meanings of the diction of *Ruby*. Early on in part one, for example, there is expression of locational and definitional ambiguity:

para lulls
re broke n
for the un of it
meny meanings
fitz and spits
to new irans (34).

This extract highlights the breakdown of singular meanings (“the broken un of it”) whilst at the same time pointing to the possibility of new more ambiguous connections (“to new irans”). There is a repetition of symbols and motifs throughout *Ruby* which form a unifying framework, but which also constantly seek to undermine any attempt to establish a single meaning. For instance, the layers of place and time may at first seem ordered, stratified. However, variations in the portrayal of place and time seek to disrupt the formation of any consistent sub-text. Indeed, the parallels are merely “para lulls”, fleeting moments of harmony in what is otherwise a far more complex narrative. Many of the sections in Part Three of *Ruby* (“Time and Revolutions”) contrast the dislocation provided by the prose with the transformative nature of the poetry. These prose passages are open to multiple meanings and are culturally inclusive but they still contain seeds that connect the narrative to something lived and specific. A sense of emotional breakdown and recovery is central to this linguistic breakdown and realignment, which recurs throughout *Ruby*.

The fourth re-orientation is the specific language of *Ruby*, which includes words, phrases and at times entire passages that are borrowed or stolen from other languages. The interplay of these words with recognisable English is a key means of offering connections with other cultures, particularly with those of the Middle East. In fact it represents an on-going dialogue between different linguistic traditions, particularly Persian but also Hebrew and Arabic. With the stanza “our hands did this” nearing the end of Part Three, for example, through the repetition of Persian words as fragments, a starting point is created which weaves meaning and non-meaning in both languages:

our hands did this
distanced . on
dast daad . on
doost haa as a dozd
the star is dozded
as daast on dust (91).

In this stanza I introduce the Persian words “dast daad” (hand gave) and connect it phonically with “hand did” and “distanced.” “Doost haa” means “friends” but is itself a false friend to “the star” as well as sounding similar to dozd, which means “thief.” “Dozded” is a meshing of the Persian word for “thief” with the verbalisation of a noun in English by adding an “-ed.” There are similar acts of fragmentation and defamiliarisation throughout *Ruby*. Foreign words and phrases are increasingly used and are designed to decontextualise *Ruby* by shifting it away from the original meanings of *The Rubaiyat*. Translations are never provided and are not needed: lack of intelligibility makes us all outsiders in the hinterland of *Ruby*. We are defamiliarised from the words and phrases, we are all forced to reconnect the sounds in new and divergent ways.

Sometimes these words are used in a meaningful way (intelligible to native speakers) whilst at other times the phrases are “meaningless” in the conventional sense. Yet most of the time they are pulled out of their original contexts or are used in ways that might puzzle speakers of the original language. Non-speakers of that language are thus at no disadvantage in this climate of multilingualism: we are all foreigners learning from one another’s vocabularies, speech registers and literary styles. Around these foreign fragments, the English language also breaks down, adding to the disruption and disarray. At times, foreign language texts have been sewn directly into the narrative, without any English references at all. But these languages do not operate in isolation: they interact and respond to one another throughout *Ruby*. It might be useful to imagine the interaction of these languages as the physical interplay of celestial bodies. Using this analogy, the languages are being drawn to one another and are spinning around each other’s words, achieving a temporary symbiotic balance. The result of this process is a new kind of comprehension that draws upon the lexicons of two languages because it does not seek to actively translate one into the other.

It is place itself, rather than language or symbolism, which is most transformed by *Ruby*. It is useful to imagine that a dialogue between cultures takes place in a specific landscape. This landscape is not the urban conurbation or “metropolis” that might at first seem to be the obvious point of contact. The metropolis of *Ruby* is full of migrants willing to share their words and speech registers. The landscape of *Ruby* offers an alternative to the standard language of the metropolis. This other place is on the edge, a hinterland, far enough away from the city streets to offer breathing space. This landscape, a hybrid imagining of England and the Middle East, cross-fertilises one literary tradition with another. It offers a space where alien words and registers meet

and spin round one another in a kind of literary dance. It creates a vital communication line, a narrative thread that, whilst being disruptive and subversive at times, allows language to be freely voiced, absorbed and adapted. It is through this hinterland that we are able to travel between one culture and another and one time and another. We connect with these free voices away from the bright lights of the metropolis, away from the fixed rules of language convention. It is here that we are able to encourage one literary tradition to have a dialogue with another and to promote cultural responses.

One important influence on the poetics of *Ruby* is Allen Fisher's *Place* (2005). A book-length poem written as a series of five sequences, *Place* takes as its focus the landscapes of South London, where Fisher was living at the time of composition. It is a series of interconnecting poems and prose passages that juxtapose the geographies of this landscape with mythology, linguistics, psychology, mathematics and conceptual art. Fisher strikes through the layers of history from a single point of view, but then extrapolates it out to a variety of landscapes. As Peter Barry highlights in "Allen Fisher and 'content-specific' poetry" (1993), Fisher's "abiding concern is what Eric Mottram calls a 'locationary action', the subject's attempts to 'place' himself, within a specific locale, within his culture, and within the historical and political juncture we inhabit with him ..." (56). *Ruby* applies much the same method of "locationary action" but swaps the urban and suburban landscapes of *Place* with environs on the margins of the city. These are natural points of beauty and calm that Khayyam uses to take shelter, take stock and reflect on this place in the world: "illuminations/ carved in/ natural and ro/ s/ e/ s" (53). As with *Place*, this passage illustrates my attempt to "carve" through the layers of history from a single point of view. However, whilst Fisher's roads are rivers that flow into a Thames that is a mature and dominant feature of the metropolis, the rivers of

Ruby are the highways and railways that skirt the hinterland – fragile, under-inhabited and easily traversed.

The objective of the methods used in *Ruby* is to produce poetry and prose that, whilst at times referring to the original *Rubaiyat*, is fundamentally new. Critically the aim is to re-locate this new work within the sphere of contemporary writing and to apply models of translation poetics that go beyond conceptions of fidelity. Khayyam is thus not simply re-interpreted, he is resuscitated and reborn in contemporary Britain. Early in *Ruby*, he opens his eyes to find himself in twenty-first century Britain, as though reborn into a new world, in a scene reminiscent of an illegal immigrant who has successfully crossed the border (34). Whilst language is broken down, it is also re-assembled in such a way that promotes cultural dialogue and encourages language to adapt and evolve. Meanings are assigned and revised, words can be created and destroyed, even sounds can have their own stories to tell, but language remains relevant to cultural discourse. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Mikhail Bakhtin argues that language and literature are living organisms that respond to texts and that meanings occur in an active dialogue with texts. To Bakhtin, all forms of writing have the capability to evolve and change cultural forms using these dialogical means.^{vi} They are not static phenomena; instead they mutate and metamorphose over time and space:

No living word relates to an object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific

environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape. (21)

By “re-living” the poetry of Omar Khayyam in *Ruby*, we subsequently revitalise our own linguistic tradition. I have created a contemporary response to *The Rubaiyat*, in order to re-invigorate it, to breathe life into it, but also to encourage a dialogue between the English and Persian literary worlds. With *Ruby*, I am insisting that poetry can be a powerful, if not exemplary, mode of discourse for this form of cultural engagement. Existing away from the metropolis, in a cultural hinterland, *Ruby* connects us with other languages, places and times.^{vii} *Ruby* offers the possibility of variety and ambiguity in meaning. It promotes a dialogue that informs and is itself informed by the polyphonic world from which it has evolved.

NOTES

ⁱ As Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, literary expressions of the Middle East are often almost entirely constructed in the West (124). This is particularly true of *The Rubaiyat*, which was virtually unknown in the Middle East prior to the first popular translation of the text into English by Edward FitzGerald in 1858. FitzGerald’s emphasis on Epicureanism in his re-interpretation of the original was not evident in any previous translation and commentary on the work. Yet by the mid twentieth-century,

much Persian scholarship focussed on Khayyam's perceived Epicureanism. See Razavi for further discussion on this point (212-216).

ⁱⁱ *Ruby* is a departure from the aims of many earlier translations of Persian poetry and from the conventional theories of translation in which they are rooted. Mainstream threads of translation studies, as discussed for example in Susan Bassnett's *Translation Studies* (1980) or Eugene Nida's *Contexts in Translating* (2001) have limited relevance to this project. In particular, *Ruby* is not a reflection of "communication theory" as Bassnett or Nida would understand it, with its stress on the importance of "reliable" translation as a form of interlingual communication. Instead, an alternative poetics is proposed, with an emphasis on a dialogical approach to understanding (see my discussion on Bakhtin, note vi). Meanings are forever evolving based on a constant dialogue between distinct but inter-related voices. These meanings are fluid and reflect the cultural contexts of the languages into which they are translated. Indeed, as Steve McCaffery of the Toronto Research Group put it in *Rational Geomancy* (1992) stepping away from the preoccupation with fidelity is itself a creative act: "If we no longer consider translation as being necessarily an information service – then it becomes a creative endeavour in its own right" (32).

ⁱⁱⁱ As Razavi points out, the Persian language is particularly musically repetitive in its poetic registers. However this propensity for musical repetition is distracting and should not be over-emphasised, as within it there are often subtle variations, such as variable pauses, which allude to quite distinct emotional effects. By breaking up these rhythmic patterns, these variations in poetic technique become more apparent. See *The Wine of Wisdom* for a more detailed explanation of these techniques (92-93).

^{iv} I am influenced by and constantly refer to a wide range of twentieth and twenty-first century British and American poets in *Ruby*. My commentary in Chapter Three (130-171) includes specific references to these poets and poetry movements, for instance see note 19 where I discuss The British Poetry Revival and its aftermath (138).

^v The velar fricative is usually represented by “x” in *Ruby*, which is its symbol in the International Phonetic Alphabet. See *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A Guide to the Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet* (1999).

^{vi} A great deal has been written concerning Bakhtin's attitudes to poetry. There is no denying that in his early writing, Bakhtin saw poetry as a monological medium, unable to offer a polyphonic expression of the world, and thus rather reactionary or at least relegated to the world of the discursive. However I would argue Bakhtin's theories are central to the development of a poetics of poetry. As Michael Eskin points out in his essay “Bakhtin on Poetry” in *Poetics Today* (2000), in his later years Bakhtin began to re-evaluate his perceptions of poetry (21). Eskin's analysis was based on readings of “The Problem of Speech Genres” (1952-53) and “The Problem of the Text” (1959-61), both published in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986). Eskin argues that Bakhtin began to conceive of a role for verse as a plausibly construed dialogical world. Indeed Eskin stresses that some poetry is highly effective as a dialogically and socio-politically exemplary mode of discourse. He cites Bakhtin's analysis of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as poetry “which exemplifies the elusiveness of generic boundaries and the subversion of authorial intentionality through an engaged dialogue” (386).

^{vii} It is important to note that the polyphony that takes place in the Hinterland is not the same as what Bakhtin called “heteroglossia.” In his essay “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as

the inherent diversity of unofficial forms of a particular national language – similar in nature to dialect. Bakhtin contrasts heteroglossia with “polyglossia,” which is the interaction of two or more national languages within a given culture, such as took place in the Hellenistic world. This does not preclude a dialogical process taking place in an extra-literary sense in the Hinterland – it just does not strictly speaking manifest itself as heteroglossia. The true heteroglossia will appear when the literary influences are presented in the work of the writer when he returns to the metropolis.

Chapter Two:

This is “What It Is”

Ruby begins with the words “this is what it is” but what is it? The short answer is that my poem consists of a sequence of texts that are contemporary interpretations of *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. There are a total of 104 pages of poetry and prose in *Ruby*, each of which is loosely based on one of the original rubais or quatrains written in Persian by Omar Khayyam in the eleventh century. However the poems in *Ruby* are not traditional rubais: each page generally consists of four stanzas written in free verse and is designed to reflect a range of contemporary poetic forms. One of these stanzas is always in the form of a quatrain, which in some way relates to a rubai from existing Persian manuscripts of *The Rubaiyat* – see the Appendix for a table of comparison (184). To the left of the four stanzas, many of the pages also contain epigrammatic prose passages, which link the poetry to a number of theoretical discourses. The overall narrative, whilst broken and deliberately opaque, at times alludes to an imagined journey by Omar Khayyam through modern-day Britain.

Chapter Three consists of what it is: the full text of *Ruby*, along with an extensive commentary. The primary objective of my commentary is to provide explanatory notes and related discussions that elucidate and explicate various aspects of *Ruby*, both in terms of the contexts in which it is written and the implications of the writing. The contexts that I discuss include the reference points and responses in the text to existing poetry, both European and Middle Eastern, and broader contemporary cultural and political realities that have shaped the work, such as the image of post-revolutionary Iran in the West. In addition to these issues, my commentary reviews the

poetic and poetic–translation practices used in *Ruby* and where they are located in terms of broader debates on poetic practice and creative writing theory. My commentary is modular in form, reviewing the poems by using a series of endnotes. Each note highlights one or two key elements that I believe have significance to the research as a whole. This kind of modular format to critical analysis has been applied by numerous writers through the centuries, from *The Discourses of Epictetus* through to Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Jacques Derrida’s *The Post Card* (1987). The modular approach of *Ruby* has specific parallels with Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (1999) – a collection of writings on the city life of Paris in the nineteenth century (most of which are found texts) – and which, like my commentary, contains ‘fragments’ which are disparate in content but which align to an overall poetic project. My aim is not, however, to use this modularity to chronicle things, as Benjamin does, but to unpack them. I am using the modular format to get into more detail about specific “text bytes” or lines, sections and images from the poetry and then unravel their significance to broader discussions on contemporary poetics, particularly the contemporary poetics of translation. The heterogeneous character of my commentary mirrors the heterogeneous nature of the poem itself, but neither text pre-supposes an over-arching master narrative to unify the poem and/or commentary. Another proponent of modularity in criticism is David Shields, who in *Reality Hunger: a Manifesto* (2010), presents a collage of unattributed quotes by luminous thinkers and writers about “our obsession with ‘the real’ in art, literature and culture” (12). Yet as in Robert Sheppard’s *Far Language: Poetics and Linguistically Innovative Poetry* (1999), the modular approach taken in this chapter seeks to “go beyond explanatory description of individual pieces, but rather to extrapolate broader conclusions and potential implications for creative writing practice

as a whole” (43). Sheppard points out that these expositions are “a way of allowing creative writing to dialogue with itself, beyond the monologic of commentary or reflection” (49). In other words, in this chapter I use critical expositions of the language and form of individual texts from *Ruby* at the micro level, to initiate a dialogue with and to challenge the poetics of *Ruby* as a whole – at the macro level. During the course of my commentary these micropoetics continuously engage with and evolve the macropoetics of *Ruby*, which elucidate some of the implications and extrapolations that I discuss in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three:

“Ruby”

MICHAEL ZAND

Ruby¹

Ruby

The Wine and Wisdom of Old Omar Khayyam (2014 UK Tour)

A poetic composition in five parts:

The Garden

Ashik

Time and Revolutions

Of Zarathustra

Water Falls

this is what it is:

eyes . open . alba

awake

midway in the journey of our life
cheered by the tumbrils
by the evergreens...

Part One:
The Garden.

the garden

of words is on the soft edge, of many new old stories²

*If there is such a thing as a language of truth,
the tensionless and even silent depository
of the ultimate truth which all thought strives for,
then this language of truth is—the true language.³*

1.

**awake . midway in the journey of our life⁴
cheered by the tumbrils . by the evergreens
I write . I don't know why
but like the notation of stars . it stays**

no special tongues are needed here⁵
you will not be sea sick⁶

omar words
para lulls
re broke n
for the un of it
meny meanings
fitz and spits
new irans now ⁷
like a tin can
un furl e d

we come with wine music and four or five broken stories⁸

2.

my fingers did this⁹

**we begin creations with constraints
by light we hands out peace
we recast . voices are unasked . songs
are the swoop of it . the beginning the¹⁰**

we find him . in candle light
together . there are better words¹¹
naked bodies . to finger tips
inside and outside
writing . moving
having writ
move on

een england e doshmani nist
een england e zendegi boodan ast¹²

If the task of the translator is viewed in this light, the roads toward a solution seem to be all the more obscure and impenetrable.¹³

3.

when I was younger in the west . the west
was a different . this

**my wheel is a whirlwind . it leaves a dust
there are no great books
our language is open . intense . impenetrable
via the rain . on puddles and stones¹⁴**

and
out of it
is it
yes
it in a
is

don't wallow in it though . cadge yourself a drop of booze¹⁵

4.

when i was younger in the east . the east
was safe . was turquoise¹⁶

we are all in it . complex and riddled
there are no minor notes
but beneath . is the un of it . a whole history
transcends any golden age

and
in it
is an
other
word
for a

i'm a poet . not a state-sponsored sooth sailor¹⁷

It is as if the kinship of languages manifests itself in translations .

5.

this is language it is
is rose gardened
found¹⁸ in a
a slow
slow
grow

words are evergreens

**if the heart discovered them . these meanings
they would know our geographies
but all frets are the same . like candlewax
young kids hurry past . freshed-eyed**

the beginning end of things . we talk . alwaysless

Translation is a mode.

6.

but in a mode
in the mode of glory¹⁹
bunting and cobbing and
of the light . in the vaults
songs not of stone . but of light

time adds to it

neither you nor I know all the stories
posterity hustles them
yet cups of tea brew themselves
in kitchens we smile and exchange words

and out of the hard ground rose a mud like fishglue²⁰

7.

through history
what else goes
a roun and a
the policy of time²¹

**a thick frost . like pearls fractured
radiant icy mildew . nothing pierces it
sentences still remain . remain unfinished
like water . working on rock²²**

as though the earth could grow

the more you see . the more you think . the less²³

This is the meeting of two texts — of the ready-made and the reactive text being created — and consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors.²⁴

8.

through history
moment by
the space
to stretch to
you . the
unbroken un of it

**the hands of the wise . translate this or that
what they called the mountains
thirty or fifty years from now . crafted
by the saw blade . dust spinning**

back to the geography of it . the land on the left²⁵

seagulls swoop across the windscreen as my mobile rings²⁶

*It is the task of the translator, for the sake of the
liberation of pure language. to break through the
decayed barriers of his own language.²⁷*

9.

through history
what it means
to forge peace
in the assarts
the streets
many pavements
psychogeographies . they enriches us²⁸

**cycles . inscriptions of the material of things
prayers end . in revolution and rebirth
which is why there are so many ideograms
let them settle . on the moon night wall**

everything that happens is

in nishapoor the tables are longer . the tables are thinner²⁹

*Our work, with its rudiments in language, is midway
between poetry and doctrine. Its products are less
sharply defined, but it leaves no less of a mark on
history.*

10.

ever greens die too . some times

**the roses dominate . in their special shirts
perfect . in perfect soil
but in the late afternoon red
spook lights dance on the water . like lilies**

vacant in the mid
in worst of thoughts
race for the saints
some time soon
itle break . up
discovering our
life before . the
bird . bird ³⁰
for us to
make it
better

the driver's taking me . he always says it's a holy city³¹

*The event of the life of the text, that is, its aura,
always develops on the boundary between two
consciousnesses, two subjects.³²*

11.

**true . there are seven sisters and a bad bull³³
but there are many other animals
look hard for them brother . with night wine
in the garden . un hurried**

of the life . what of it . what else goes
in this lovely morning light like
pathways through it . you will be with
now and in the embers
evergreens die too . sometimes

from town to form . from place to³⁴
crumble soil around . with a new
as the east and west chatter
reminding and redeeming
mashing layers of time . on time

the decades . the rubies

Part Two:

Ashik.³⁵

ashik

takes roads through fields that carry sea-glow, yellow

*The question “what is a relevant translation?” would
return the question “what is translation?” or “what
should a translation be?”³⁶*

12.

**now . is really our time too . youth
salaam means wisdom and life . wine too³⁷
toasting me happy . riding the city roofs
a train of lichen . dog days and flutes**

an old radio
or a radio gram
a crackling afghan woman
i was so
young . my first
memories
were of a tent spread³⁸

I am from London but London is not my city³⁹

these clichés
are weapons of mass poetics⁴⁰
are allegories of a one thousand and one and eleven and a

*We are all mediators, translators, transmitters. In philosophy, as in all domains, you have to navigate an implicit cultural exchange, relays between cultural places and times.*⁴¹

13.

it would seem so

**if I could control the world . I would have
but once in it . in its plurals and tenses
in its hand band sky eye
nothing could be better . than its runnings**

a higher viewpoint
in the human race is that
he may be born
fixed once and
for all . but
dogmas
differ

he steps onto the street . sees a white cloud

14.

which is why I speak for

ashik ashik . I am the edges brother . breathe through me⁴²

warping and weaving . spheres and spears

what you see is what you get

the alignment of arabia

a trail of ash . a smokeless burn

for the ancients

prayers

hymns

processions

whispers

bells

nomadic . in between . ghostings⁴³

15.

multiplicities

**the pity of it . tired eyes and hands
injured by blades . the ink dry
a calendar with a date ringed in red
the pity of it . the way we**

he steps onto the street . sees a white cloud ahead of him
there will be a storm no doubt

properly speaking
a lofty truth
in itself
pers⁴⁵
for
a

*At the word go we are within the multiplicity of
languages and the impurity of the limit. This makes
it impossible to decide the source language to which,
for example, the word "relevante" answers [relève], a
word that I leave within quotation marks for now.⁴⁴*

16.

in transit . free of cartographies⁴⁶

**we hold on . gripping our wine tight
somewhere between the sea and the birds
water colours blot . waves and music
are an explanation of colours⁴⁷**

soon he is lost . but he keeps his eyes on the cloud . happy
to make his way through the narrow streets and alleys

Nima smiles
straddles us
between us
in his middlezone
in his boats⁴⁸

17.

I believe

*We only ever speak one language – and, since it
returns to the other, it exists asymmetrically, always
for the other, from the other, kept by the other,
coming from the other, remaining with the other,
and returning to the other.⁴⁹*

**the narrow road is everywhere⁵⁰
etching . while the rest of us steal a boart
a drip drip trip . like a hornwort
spellbound by its foibles . and our travails**

he sees other men as he walks . travelling like him . with

but we're still bounderied
what he comes from
is words to
make us
new

18.

don't worry about the baroque

the cloud . as he walks towards it . seems to dissipate
there are many questions many answers

all of us get to the two blue doors . .
sub voicives shouting atatatat at them
in . then . out
like an oxy gin release . a peace⁵¹

interpretations of life
illuminations
carved on
strange
new
ro
s
e
s

19.

an egg on the end of a thread⁵²

it separates . drifts apart into thousands of fragments

tumbling in the fall . life goes on

red charcoal burns

absinthe . disruptive . it burns in a drum

a free heart a . a waft of air

the folly of these men

their language

their gait

their

style

is

a

*Whilst we share words by relay, there are a very
great number of them — it is an uncontrollable
exchange of dogma and difference.*

20.

if only I were a

it is a cloud of flies which lifts and breaks . sweeping

**time changes . a pen trajectory . changes
a business of cloudroll . striving
tip toes . from the doost i once was
to pomegranates and the opposite of eyes**

as the strata of the earth

preserves us

exxhange

us in

wor

d

s

s

s

*One should never pass over in silence the question of
the tongue in which the question of the tongue is
raised and into which discourse on translation is
translated.*

21.

if only I were . better

he went into the street again . he was walking quickly but to

we have all the time . as petals sweep past

our lyric resists . re generates⁵³

like a long straight track against fingertips

kites flying . reshaping possibility

the heat in us

the zest

to follow through

follow through style

follow

transformations

of day

*We often forget, in this same familiarity, how the
unity or identity, the independence of the word
remains a mysterious thing, precarious, not quite
natural, that is to say historical, institutional, and
conventional.*⁵⁴

22.

if only I were a . a

upward into the indifferent sky . sweeping him up too

some time soon

itle make . up

new words

new woods

because of bird . bird

because it translated itself too⁵⁵

under stand ing the uni verse . the one

a pilgrim age is

a torrent . in this gust of a

wither . where there . w . be with a

23.

a . a . a

up ward into the indifferent . the best of all of us is a

four elements and seven planets⁵⁶

an deep . an delightful

or maybe a slightly broken paving slab

is the universe . if it came

the taste of

language

in the mouth

chalk

salt

clay

ay

Subjectivity is not meant to replace an authentic or single-voiced expression – rather to illuminate the hierarchical relationship that many readers to poetry express.

24.

an colours an

**the heart whispers . azure and black
turned . will turn . the many will watch
and so and . so . a door opens
shifts and overlaps . instances to live**

i am the ashik . the forger . the new

justly gardened
just roses
by land
sea
re
nw
ed
it

25.

there are many names . stories⁵⁷

but patterns are threadbare . they mark us

the good and the bad . in the rice husks

sift through them . as the wheel turns

S

*Translation then becomes necessary and impossible,
like the effect of a struggle for the appropriation of
names.*

we are all naked and breathing it

petals across our l

p e t a l s a

p e t

a l

s

gv . gv l v . l v v

⁵⁸

Part Three:
Time and Revolutions.

time and revolutions

divide us, hiding the many isolated fires that warm us

*Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent
on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden
beneath the woman? Is it the individual, furnished
with a philosophy of the Woman? Is it universal
wisdom?*⁵⁹

26.

we uncover the earth⁶⁰

**a book of words . with a tear drop blot
the jet stream blew it . withered it
yet on a mountain skin . a field opens
wide open flowers . from the**

field . flowers . scythes . smiles . stories⁶¹

grey gold

a cloud

implies

still

ness

lang gauges . ex changes . ages

27.

symbols scrawled on the walls

**our sages are exhausted . grieve statues
at the foot . broken . doom hearted
there are other worlds . times . revolving
dark red . veiled . blue at the centre**

anything about anything . dance without moving . water

water holds
erect the long
strong
stems
of
lily buds

28.

under an orange tree . recline there

when we are children . we learn

for a time

flowers grow . through cracks in the earth

until dusk . dust . as the wind carries us⁶²

art

is a step

away or to

from them them

all the meanings of them⁶³

there are so many of us climbing to see how

to un break it it

*For him, for us too, it is language that speaks, not
the author.* ⁶⁴

29.

I believe

**our friends have . gone
each one and an other . gone
laughing at the sun . at the wine . gone
time slips . to the sound of**

a piercing note running across our skin . reminds us of

we gather at the days end and days
our reparations
renewal
for
the
hills
the hills

30.

statues in a field . ruins

**the kind and queen of the caravan
no justice . a long way from gypsy priests
meet me again at that time . in the hollow
find me gold and silver in the river bed**

increasing rain
the old man
smiles and
grumbles
sweet
nothings at

shadows

*To write is, through a prerequisite impersonality, to
reach that point where only language acts,
'performs', and not 'me'.*

31.

shadows change

**dawn . in its turning . aval ast
perhaps there are equal measures
but when it all goes up in smoke
the ant and the wolf feed together**

lyric . diminished
it is how we say the say
that's the peach of it
diminished
better
better for it
much better
than an I or you⁶⁵

fire works and bon fires . im pulse we can share

32.

listen

to where the breath sto

we fill it with shards

hardened . candied

an old jug is a

when I was grown . grown from home . he remembered me

water drops . oceans

dust or a speck . in the universe

to the place I must be at every layer of time

like a rude sport in an open field

we never saw one . the sea roses

every rose garden was just a rose garden . renewed⁶⁶

*In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be
disentangled, nothing deciphered.*

33.

there are so many moons

lovers pull together . by the shadows of the bonfire

**hurry and through the madness
naked . nuanced . like a private carnival
be the tenderness . the hundred kisses
wine . rebirth⁶⁷**

the moon is a sow
is a sow of
grunts
smiles
bubbles
and
laughter rocks

34.

gardens thrive

every garden gardens . a world to itself

**the jug . the lips of the bowl . the neck
hung in the frame . a long way from home
ask you say⁶⁸ . in the hollow
like children peeling oranges at the**

alive

with

the jug

it waters me

and the garden below

the garden below

*A structure can be followed through this multiplicity
— 'run' like the thread of a stocking at every point
and at every level*

35.

we are words too

they speak their tongue and I listen . there is no magic here

old fabrics . silks . they fool us

we stand edge on . against a huge window

red robes of flesh

sharing a single wine cup . we smile

yerushaalem zendast⁶⁹

chiragash zendast

zend ast

zend

as

s

t

36.

a light breeze

**tonight its over . its time for coats
for bending branches . against congruence
against the lack of surprises or a
sudden passage of high cloud⁷⁰**

the old road
is gone . is
blocked
but . there
and is
straw
berries

even if men did this . when it . men . truly truly
then i . would . stretch . across to . make it better

*But there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is
to be ranged over, not pierced.*

37.

of brilliant flies
they jostle together protractedly
teeming like sands

among the foliage
the world sucked joyfully
pierced with light

**wine . among the foliage
arching the marvellous
those snarling monsters
the river murmurs . the lilies**

and to grow in the corn
as snow does to a fire
lovely outstretched nowness
a little wild ray of

38.

so lustful was the land
can you dig it . now the knights have gone

walking in to the world

naked

one step at a time

battle scars . an archeology of words

phosphorus tape burns

walking in
to the world the
the next life
waiting
for roads
words . worlds . back
the remembering . ring

*Information and symbols... is that all? No, for I am
still held by the image. I read, I receive a third
meaning.⁷¹*

39.

so dry beyond the dream

**a spirit whispered . circled me
play weird and vaporous games in the air
expelled heavy similes . metonyms
relax . your vision will come**

look beyond the cutting edge
daast an . the stories . broken up
under the bull bullshit

alone . restless
fading
with what memories
such a man
grows
old
o

*I don't know what is signified; at least I am unable to
give it a name.*

40.

beneath the towers

so misty beside the rain
zounds life was hard
like poking mammoths in the twilight
but damn we'll miss it
when it's gone

**beneath the towers . we sang once
our friends judged us . endured us
for fleeting moments there were smiles
centuries pass . fields grow now**

beneath the towers

41.

crowds in the rain . numb

I dream of happy ghouls . in the rain
tighten up your wig . or
the invisible kings have gone⁷²
so we gather wheels and whorls
for the fools and the ashiks

on the surface . by the river bank
inside . we are open eyed
no words are needed amongst friends
long gone or yet to come

we gather wheels and whorls
for the fools and the ashiks

42.

quite quiet beside the old man . the world

all red beside the spirits
we condemn electric people in the vapors
and their false flags of easy happy
are watchful . in case passions fly
jangling angry keys
until we tire of it

**quite quiet beside our comrades
a long way home . with wounds and dreams
but his gypsy words remain with us
a friend with whom to pull down flags⁷³**

our symbols are never enough . they never really were

Obtusus means that which is blunted, rounded in form.

43.

hunter . hunted

so misty
beside the
was hard
like a
but we will
when it's gone

**the king in his palace . cup in hand
assesses a field of graves . as
in how so many places . asses are⁷⁴
hunted . hunter hunted**

but we will
when it's gone

*The obtuse meaning disturbs, sterilizes — it is a
meta language beyond symbols — a kind of
criticism.*

44.

the town walls are still

sailors learn
unsure alive
fading slowly
memories water
black harbours
many pasts
knowing why

**the town walls are still standing
we still love them . and our freedom
to open all the very low windows . we
carry on . in a flurry of the new⁷⁵**

curving up

45.

an unreliable map . but it works

the rocks were indeed

hidden by

leaves

and

turf

birds perch on a wire⁷⁶ . where

they gossip . strangely tiny in the light

and grind diamonds out of hale stones

twittering . songs we understand⁷⁷

above us

*This is the epitome of a counter-narrative;
disseminated, reversible, set in its own temporality –
an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and
yet “true”*

46.

in a sweet waft
of a non
story
his
is

**we dig in . like the souls that we are
founded on words . on dusted tiles
layers of memory . the archaics
as a monument . an old kind . a replica**

we are . there
for a brief

never

47.

there was once a leaf⁷⁸

**early in the morning . whispers are outed
out of sync . out of favour
the last day of reckoning . for you and me
is bending . standing astride of . life**

with veins
strands
it danced
turned
as ore . lit up
of the sun

long shadows on the earth as if to say

48.

lost in broad daylight

**morning . at to the bank of wood
roses and birds . undisguised . naked
their faces closes in . warm as pearls
a smile . an intangible repetition**

the refugee
takes another road
across the
sentient webs of earth
to make fight
to make fire

not knowing why

*I thought of myself as one of those children who
prefer the picture to the text*

49.

clouds come

**clouds . this sorry scheme of things
thirty birds confer . along constellations
young comrades . sweep away
blossoms and harvests . smoke and dust⁷⁹**

the stars rose early
huge
gibbous
warm
a loud of
the wind went out as

the cloud came

*The text of pleasure is not necessarily the text that
recounts pleasure... but one that transcends it.*

50.

the washes

noctilucient sky sweeps⁸⁰

norouz in a north land . the wheel slows now⁸¹

tomorrow there will be dust

for wine . for the pleasure principle

he said

it had been snowing

for months

faint and orange

even in the hot south

even for us

we simmer

we must move to live . brother

*The pleasure of representation is not attached to its
objects, but to its uncertainty.⁸²*

51.

**they come from us . the tulips
from our heads and shoulders . fighting
what they call the corridor of uncertainty
by its very nature . it stumps us**

they come from us
from when the world was new
from when it was impossible
when it was lilies
when it just was

they come from us . us
from the seeds we planted beneath the towers

they come from us . us
they come from us . us . the tulips

52.

**wine . makes philosophers poetic too
they steal our clothes they
pass us the shiraz they they
share seafish . we call them seigneur**

the cloud came . green

the moon rose early . a
huge
gibbous
warm
loud
paradox
the wind went out as it

the cloud came . green

53.

tomorrow you

**wrap // in this heavy cloak of nil // knife
wilderer . like a slanted jar . I realise
your name unifies the heart
the world is lifted into its place**

what can make good of it all and all
these few pauses that are

we will make good of it . all and all

*An old, a very old tradition: hedonism has been
repressed by nearly every philosophy.*

54.

the cloud came . red

**the wine is gone now . an act
like a gesture of fraternity . a fig
repetitions of folly
still beat . these are ours veins brother**

our hands did this
distanced . on
dast daad . on
doost haa as a dozd
the star is dozded
as daast on dust⁸³

parts . paradox. perpetua

*Ultimately we find ourselves defended by the
marginal figures, by Sade, Fourier and most of all
Nietzsche.*

55.

faces

**the wine jug persists. does no harm
fill it . pass it . drink shiraz and chardonnay
for pleasure and for place
it becomes us**

you made this
this calendar of time and place⁸⁴
to where the breath sto
we fill it with shards
hardened . candied
an old jug is a
is a

there are many faces . this is why time and
revolutions

Part Four:

Of Zarathustra.

of zarathustra

or of the whole of life not just now and the
dusks

*The fall of our footsteps rings too hollow through
their streets. And just as at night, when they are in
bed and hear a man abroad long before sunrise, so
they ask themselves concerning us: where goes the
thief?* ⁸⁵

56.

iti vuttakam⁸⁶

**watching the potter . threading
the master . feet and wings
footsteps outside . a thief trips
we . immersed in it . making it whole**

immersed in it
all of it
when they found a
writing his better
in the light
light of the

meet me
together break . the loneliness of the east and the west

57.

when I was younger I used to
it was a different then it was much

**this urn . love struck and clay sided
tangled around the world
the lyric is wrong . but with wine it eases
like the birds and the bears and the birds**

and
out of it
is it it
baar . aan ⁸⁷
it in a
is

where . when . wafted . weaved . we . the rain . it collects it

58.

when i was younger it was
tur . quoise

there are many stores and storage rooms
words and earthenware anthems
thousands . too many
asking questions . laughing and weeping

and
in it
is an
other
word
for a

it collects it

*Wisdom makes us weary... nothing will come of it as
we choke on our reason.*⁸⁸

59.

this is language is
over gardeneded
dead headed
in a mode
a slow
slow

finding a way through it . my words my game my rules

drunk on sacred wine⁸⁹
the forest is full of us . brother
branches bend to vault us closer to God
I will always live here

sea gulls a cross

*Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen. Der Mensch ist
Etwas, das überwunden werden soll. Was habt ihr
gethan, ihn zu überwinden?⁹⁰*

60.

above us . above man
in the ways of water
and earth and
hilson and jaeger
moving chairs . in the vaults

some time soon . good

enjoy the flute music
there are no super men along the tigris⁹¹
and even if there were . who cares
we'd just move our chairs a little closer

we break . many times . between places and times

*Wahrlich, ein schmutziger Strom ist der Mensch. Man
muß schon ein Meer sein, um einen schmutzigen
Strom aufnehmen zu können, ohne unrein zu
werden.*⁹²

61.

through history
what else goes
you decide
a roun and a
a fragment of ⁹³

**as a boy I had a cup . aval va akhar
in which from time to time I kept
memories of flowers and seeds and other
tokens of love**

as though the earth grows slowly

the more . the more

62.

the cloud washes . is

**tonight I'll make something
of myself
for science or art or the common good
for you**

he said
it had been
for many
even in the
even with the
even though

tomorrow the dust . dus

*Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there
stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose
name is self. In your body he dwells; he is all our
bodies.*⁹⁴

63.

it would seem so

**branches are hints of hope
fingers . dispersals
give it time brother and they will
speak it . in the night**⁹⁵

a higher
in the human race
he may be
fixed
for all
dog
ma

I found myself seated in a baroque room . a uni verse

*Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the
Superman – a rope over an abyss.⁹⁶*

64.

ashik . ashik

**too much wine
but then so were you my friend
there are starfish and other sea wracks
stiffened by the sun . alive**

for the
ashik
ashik
processions
a rope for
whispering home truths

men in fezzes wenches . we have hats too . place to play⁹⁷

65.

me . we

paradise . bathed in wine

we have often fought ourselves in a

full moon

without sheep and sheepdogs . reckless

I look up from the street and window and I see an old man

prop . early speaking

a lofty truth

is itself

a pin

or a

pin

*We embark on a dangerous crossing, a dangerous
wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous
trembling and halting.*

66.

temporals . streams

nobody knows . certainly not me

there's only one cat

he just keeps moving around

watching for a storm . eyes wide eyed⁹⁸

temporals . streams of light and music . colours

Nima smiles

straddles us

between us

in his middlezone

in his boats⁹⁹

67.

ruby . leave

this sphere is hardly home
like a life without lines around a cup¹⁰⁰
it's a big bag of hope and fear
a spectacle . all too brief

travelling like him . the colours stream passed me

but I'm still
by each
it is a
after
eff
ec
t

*Companions, the creator seeketh, not corpses –and
not herds or believers either. Fellow-creators the
creator seeketh – those who crave new values on new
tables.*

68.

mirror . behind me an old jew plays the piano

the cloud . in the navy sky

**the dances . they started and I joined hands
watching the sky . blue in the afterglow
for the flower . for jamshid's cup¹⁰¹
the dances . illuminations and streams**

interpretations of life

illuminations

streams

if you

li

k

e

69.

an egg on the end of a thread

fear . it smashes apart into thousands of fragments

tumbling in the abyss . life goes on

red charcoal burns

absent . disruptive . it burns in a drum

a free heart a . a waft of air

the folly of all men

their language

their gait

their

style

is

a

*I will make company with creators, with harvesters,
with rejoicers: I will show them the rainbow and the
rope.*

70.

if only I were a

look through the mirror . I am an old man again

time changes us . moves us

hands . fingers . pen

it is the trajectory of cloud roll

it harbours middlemen . dangermen¹⁰²

as the strata of the earth

preserves us

exxhange

exx

ch

a

y

71.

levetov . rexroth . williams

the old man stops playing . he walks gingerly

**we have the time we have . through it
white fields . the scent of camomile
a long strong chain through it
to a explosion of musical movement**

the cold in us

wisdom

breeds thus

the

transformations

of our day

72.

if only I were a . a

it is a cloud of flies which lifts and breaks
sweeping upward against the window
sweeping us up too

there was once a leaf

**in to the world . a body of truth
angels have inventories too . brother
creatures . elements . spheres
one . all . whole**

*Sharing poetic words always lifts us higher—
specifically, to the realm of the clouds: upon these we
place our motley bastards.¹⁰³*

73.

the clouds . colours

this moment . matters

I do not want patterns . they just mark

the good and the bad . mark

sift through them . as the wheel turns . alive

there was once a leaf . there was once a

with veins . strands

with each other . this leaf

de coeur

loved

x ¹⁰⁴

*And who among us poets has not adulterated his
wine? Many a poisonous mixture has been contrived
in our cellars; much that is indescribable was
accomplished there.¹⁰⁵*

74.

hunter . hunted

the leaf
danced
turned
was . as ore
lit up
in and out
of the sun

**the king in his palace . cup in hand
animals and the earth find him
in how many places . the refugee . ready
hunter hunted . hunted**

it was once with us . a germanic constriction of the throat

when it's gone . it will return as a

*There are so many things between heaven and
earth of which only the poets have dreamed.*

75.

the cup . conjoining to little words . worlds in

the leaf
it blotted the earth
as it skipped
catching a drop or two
skirting . in . this place
spits . and slits

**the parts of the cup . conjoin
drunken heads are hands grasping
for music or windows
for the ether of revocables**

it is me who writes it . meddles . some times¹⁰⁶

*Alas, one thing is the thought, another thing is the
deed, and another thing is the idea of the deed. The
wheel of causality rolls between them and over them.*

76.

is a series of plastic chairs

in . this place
the leaf recoils
an unknown tree
an unknown
spits and slits
honest . worthy
de coeur

**metaphysical weeds . on a wire
strangely tiny in the light
they grind sensuous diamonds
trying to sing songs we understand**

finally . i have this sense . that i am one with my skin¹⁰⁷

Part Five:
Water Falls.

water falls

triumph as the sky stamps its feet and raises its hat

*These are the hypothetical primordial songs which
preceded the epic and a generic epic tradition, songs
about contemporaries that directly echoed events
that have just occurred.¹⁰⁸*

77.

the sweet
waft of
quince
begins
the cycle
lifts it¹⁰⁹

**we dig in . like the souls that we are
founded on words . on dusted tiles
layers of memory . the archaics
as a monument . an old kind . a replica**

we are . here . smiling
for a brief

green

*Such songs we do not know although we must
presume they existed. We can only guess the nature
of these aëdonic songs or of the cantilenas.*

78.

pushkin was always enough¹¹⁰

**early in the morning . soft words
in sync . in sleeplessness
the patches fall . for you and all of you
bending . standing astride of it . flat**

with veins
strands
it danced
turned
as ore . lit up
of the sun

long shadows . my hands wrinkled . I am very old now

79.

lost in broad daylight

we shared our feasts

beasts and birds . drunken night lights

heads drop a little

a smile is an intangible repetition

with veins . strands

life threads

which touch us

make us feel

a little

more

not knowing why

*Character itself does not grow, does not change, it is
merely filled in by the events of life itself, imperfectly
disclosed and fragmentary.¹¹¹*

80.

green

**the tulip grows tough
in spite of the kings and nightingales
he thrives in the ultra violet
letting her rest her head on his**

it blotted the earth

as it skipped

we . i am

xay am

xay

yy

y

y

the cloud came to see us there. green

81.

wine . as the philosophers turned poetically
to where their clothes were stolen
pass us the shiraz they said . make us
drink it up and . we will call you seignior

the cloud came . it was green

and at the end
the leaf
when it fell
there were new roots
from the stretch
the sky breaking the earth
as if to say I

the cloud came again and again . always green

*While a poet's words endure in his own language,
even the greatest translation is destined to become
part of the growth of its own language and
eventually to be absorbed by its renewal.*¹¹²

82.

**so . as you know . it goes
a longer road
seize it . carve yourself a construct
buy many shoes . or all the shoes**

from what it is . it is

may
may
a little
and often
from various countries

so with eight books . shoes . in a kinship with sohrab we¹¹³

*Images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of creation; they are creatively transformed in different eras far distant from the day and hour of their original birth.*¹¹⁴

83.

how autumn values spring

**cockerels and the morning blue
there is something else there too . it
fizzes . like sky bubbles
like the world as an idea of you**

this
was
not
ever
the
edge
of
it

we have no where to go . and a life time to get
there

84.

shoulders are temples

time to seek forgiveness

our future acts . however flawed

are last nights wine and cigarettes

in the tenth century . there were no returns

a smell or

taste

of wind

in the

the

throat

these are our songs of insolence and
inexperience¹¹⁵

*Understanding. The dismemberment of
understanding into individual acts which in turn
merge inseparably into a unified process.*¹¹⁶

85.

this is language is
y(our) sounds and spaces
y(ou) con(texts)
in pieces
or

a thousand pearls in a cave

**time to drink up . sweet and lowdown
like the wise fool or the kings fool
kais and jamshid have long gone
leaving us doorways . a palace of traceries¹¹⁷**

we . the universe

*There is neither a first nor a last word and there are
no limits.*

86.

waters emerge us
hulled by silt
in alignment
scattered
expanding
honest

soul brain . skin tips ¹¹⁸

**it is morning again . it always was
smashing the pebbles
fighting the jazz of fame . of reputation
love fastens . time sees to the rest**

poetry speaks too . with us¹¹⁹

*Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have
its homecoming.*

87.

carnivals end it
up in the clouds they sigh
we are all people
no single special story
just you and wine and
our bodies¹²⁰

**deep in the rondure . in the azure
bring back your lips from the brink
and for the sake of art or adjectives
don't be modern . be mountains**

a gift . there are colours . and love . the world rolls on¹²¹

the lute broke . so why fix it¹²²

*Bringing distant things closer without indicating the
intermediate links.*

88.

where shall we go
from here
as it washes us . x
the noise of water . xx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx¹²³
the angels of the . x . of
esfand . xxxxx . bala band are
the nishapour blues
ink . life¹²⁴

roses are our guiding lights
we make the birds and we are the birds
we have always had this gift
on our lips / like water / like the falls //

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx . the sound thins into melody¹²⁵

water . falls &¹²⁶

forged old and new . for ruby . for you

A COMMENTARY ON RUBY

¹ As well as being a contraction of *The Rubaiyat*, the title reasserts the importance of form when interpreting Omar Khayyam. *Ruby*, like *The Rubaiyat*, is derived from the Arabic word for four, (“rub”) and firmly fixes itself in “the poetry of the four.” Traditionally the “rub” is associated with rubais, which are individual vignettes in four line blocks, rhyming quatrains which stand as poems in their own right, often with philosophical or mystical themes. The “rub” in *Ruby* is more expansive: these are explorations in form that are variously assembled in four poetic clusters but that rarely follow the formal rubai structure. In this sense, these poems are in the spirit of “rub” but not the same, and thus they are adjectivised. Rather like if something is akin to fish, it is described as fishy: similarly here this work is akin to “rub,” so it is ruby.

² The conceit of a garden, particularly a rose garden, is iconic in Persian literature. Consider for instance, Sa’di’s *Gulestan* (“Rose Garden”) which is described by Omar Ali Shah in his introduction to his translation of the poem as “one of the greatest medieval Persian works, which is as relevant today as in its own time” (2). *Gulestan* is a series of stories and poems collected by Sa’di in the thirteenth-century that highlight a variety of aspects of the human condition. Ralph Waldo Emerson provided the preface for Frances Gladwin’s translation of *Gulestan* writing, “Sa’di exhibits perpetual variety of situation and incident ... he finds room on his narrow canvas for the extremes of lot, the play of motives, the rule of destiny, the lessons of morals, and the portraits of great men” (2). Emerson also notes how *Gulestan* is the original source for many stories since associated with other writers:

“he has furnished the originals of a multitude of tales and proverbs which are current in our mouths, and attributed by us to more recent writers” (3). *Ruby* is a similar *mélange* but the roses appear at the level of language rather than narrative, “a garden/of words” which provides the basis for its own “many new old stories.”

³ From Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator” (1923). This quotation highlights Benjamin’s assertion that a process of supplementation of language is taking place through translation because of the difference between source and target language. The innate infidelity of this process is the source of an enrichment of the target language: foreign, untranslatable concepts and structures are brought into a language and take part in the process of an ongoing complement of languages with its climax in “the language of truth” (3).

⁴ The first poem in *Ruby* begins with an allusion partly to the opening lines of Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*– “Midway along the road of our life” (1), and partly to the opening quatrain of FitzGerald’s first edition translation of *The Rubaiyat* (1859): “Awake! For Morning in the Bowl of Night” (1). *Ruby* is, however, a self-conscious challenge to both of these other two openings, for whilst it references these texts as a helpful point of departure, the broken nature of my lines hints at a fundamental disharmony in the narrative of *Ruby*.

⁵ This is partly a reference to the Arabic word for Persians, which is “*al ajam*” or “the tongueless.” The term derives from the time of the Arab conquest of Persia when the Persian language was banned and the speaking of Persian was punished by lingual mutilation. The “no tongues are needed” reference also highlights that *Ruby* is not a work that requires any special knowledge of Persian language or culture – that it is open to all who can read it (in English).

⁶ The poems of *Ruby* do not follow the prescribed classical rubai form. In Persian verse the prescribed form is a four-line (or two-couplet) poem, with rhymes at the middle and end of each line. In English poetry, the traditional approach is a quatrain with an iambic rhythm, end-rhymed ABAB or ABCB. *Ruby* in contrast is written in free verse with stanzas of varying lengths and with no fixed rhythm or meter. Each page contains a quatrain (in bold) that is a broad translation of an original Khayyam rubai, and hence provides a flavour of the original form and content. This is why I have called the sequence *Ruby* rather than “Rubai” because they are similar to rubais but not exactly the same. In *The Development of the Sonnet*, Michael Spiller describes a prescribed form as “one whose duration and shape are determined before the poet begins to write” (2), which by definition limits the scope of poets to express themselves freely and without too much deference and interference from the past. Contemporary rubai writing, as with sonnet writing, is dogged, however, by poets who struggle to move away from the prescribed forms. As Jeff Hilson puts it in his introduction to *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets*, “the number of poets who continue to use iambic pentameter on a consistent basis is alarming and after a while the persistent rhythm washing through their poems induces a kind of nausea akin to sea-sickness” (14).

⁷ Iran did not exist as a geographical entity at the time of Omar Khayyam, even though his work has been appropriated as part of Iran’s cultural heritage. Indeed the Iranian state was only founded with the ascension of Shah Ismail in 1487, many years after the end of what is commonly regarded as the golden age of Persian poetry. See Michael Axworthy’s *Iran: Empire of the Mind* for further discussion of the illusive nature of Iranian nationhood (21).

⁸ There is a distinct visual layout to *Ruby*. Each page consists of four poems on the right hand side and often a single piece of prose on the left hand side. The poetry always consists of one quatrain, typed in bold, which is a direct (if often rather broad-brush) translation of an original rubai from Omar Khayyam. The other three stanzas vary in length but are designed to connect with the quatrain in some way, be it in terms of theme, style or language. In this respect, the complete translation of the rubai should be seen as the entire page rather than simply the quatrain, as the entire page relates to the original in some way. By arranging the rubai in this way, I am challenging and responding to a narrow or prescriptive approach to its form. Again I refer to *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets*, which is similarly interested in challenging interpretations of a traditional form: “Critics often talk of the sonnet’s unique and beautiful asymmetry – the traditional octave and sestet of the Italian sonnet being just off kilter – but with too much ‘apt use’ this fundamental instability at the form’s heart has become blithely accepted and the form itself blandly ‘beautiful’ ” (Hilson 17).

⁹ This line alludes to verse 51 of Edward FitzGerald's translation of *The Rubaiyat*: “The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,/Moves on.” The poem in turn, refers to Belshazzar's feast as related in the *Book of Daniel*: “In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote” (5:5). The fingers here are mine, rather than Khayyam's or even Edward FitzGerald's. By emphasising my authority over the text I am thus again highlighting the lack of fidelity in my translations.

¹⁰ The last two lines of this stanza were created using a poetic constraint technique derived from a method presented by Lescure in his essay “N+7” in *Oulipo*

Compendium (1998), based on an N+7 movement. The N+7 constraint involves replacing an original word with a new one that is 7 places along in a dictionary. The original words were taken from the Whinfield translation of *The Rubaiyat*.

Constraints such as N+7 are a means of triggering ideas and inspiration through the generation of series of words using mechanical methods, such as picking words out of a dictionary at certain pre-determined intervals and positions. A similar approach is taken in many other stanzas in *Ruby*, particularly in the stanzas highlighted in bold, using either the Whinfield translation, or FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat*, as starting points.

¹¹ This is a reference to St Jerome, as depicted in Caravaggio's *St Jerome Writing* (1605-1605). The image is of the poet translator at work, a motif that I repeatedly return to during the course of *Ruby*.

¹² This couplet translates from the Persian as "this isn't the England of enemies, this is the England of rebirth." There are occasional passages in *Ruby* made of foreign words and phrases, often derived from the Persian language. These passages are never translated but left hanging in the original, barely decipherable to those unfamiliar with these tongues. The aim is to try to connect languages without the constraints of translation in a literal sense – to enjoy language for the sake of its sounds as much as for its meanings. See note 69 (157), for a more detailed discussion on the use of sounds, particularly foreign sounds, in *Ruby*.

¹³ In the English translation "The Task of the Translator" by Harry Zohn (quoted here) the religious connotation of Benjamin's terms is sometimes less obvious than in the German original. What Zohn refers to as "obscure and impenetrable" hints at a mystery or spiritual element to Benjamin's thinking on translation. Sarah Dudek (2004) argues that "The Task of the Translator" is "bound

to the Cabbalistic tradition, which is in itself enigmatic and contradictory—and so is Benjamin’s essay” (3). Benjamin promotes an all-embracing notion of language as the basis of translation: the world is made of language and the final aim is to understand this “textus” of the world, to achieve a synergy in some sense between the inadequate human languages and the language of God.

¹⁴ The relationship between form and meaning is deliberately obscured in *Ruby*. It would be wrong to suggest that there are no meanings behind the words. Overall, however, I try to avoid presenting the poetry in such a way that restricts the reading to one transparent and proscribed understanding. In common with many other avant-garde compositions, such as Bergvall’s “Via” which is subtly referenced here, the aim is to open up the text and encourage the reader to assign his or her own interpretation. Often a clear understanding of the “meaning” of the text is secondary to the effects of the language itself. Avant-garde poetry movements have often emphasised language over meaning, none more so than the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school, which was most active in North America in the 1970s through to the early 1990s. The terms “L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E” and “Language poetry” are multi-faceted and beyond the scope of this discussion, but the poetics of this movement raised important questions about the relationship between language and meaning. Writing in *Open Letter* (Summer 1977), two of its key proponents, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, admit that “if it can be summarised at all [...Language poetry...] has had to do with exploring the numerous ways meanings can be (and are) realised — revealed — produced in writing” (46). As Ian Davidson writes in *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* “the Language writers operate within that tension between word without referent and word with direct referent” (92). Language poetry chased the art form back to its source – in this case words more often than sounds or letters;

the idea was that language should dictate meaning rather than the other way around. The movement was motivated by mistrust of the authority of the confessional voice, but also a mistrust of lyricism and grammar. *Ruby*, just as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry before it, breaks sentences into disjointed phrases and breaks phrases into words in order to cleanse language of complacency and banality.

¹⁵ This is a reference to Basil Bunting's translation of Ferdowsi's epic poem *The Shahnameh* as presented *Bunting's Persia* (2012). Bunting gives us a subtle new West-Eastern symmetry when he links Hafiz to Catullus by using "desinas ineptire" (an echo of Catullus' poem number 8) as an epigraph at a moment of anguished yet comic self-recognition: "Give respectability and pride the go-by, Hafiz,/ cadge yourself a drop of booze and get/ crapulously drunk" (27).

¹⁶ Turquoise has been regarded for thousands of years as a holy stone in a number of cultures, and particularly in the Middle East as a bringer of good fortune or as a talisman. The oldest evidence for this claim was found in Ancient Egypt, where grave furnishings with turquoise inlay were discovered, dating from approximately 3000 BC. In ancient Persia the sky-blue gemstones were worn round the neck or wrist as protection against evil. Turquoise mining and trading were important Persian industries at the time of Khayyam, so he is likely to have been very familiar with its properties and superstitions. See David Pogue's *The turquoise: a study of its history, mineralogy, geology, ethnology, archaeology, mythology, folklore, and technology* (1915), for a more detailed discussion on the subject.

¹⁷ Corruption of a quote from Robert Duncan in Lisa Jarnot's article "Robert Duncan — The Ambassador from Venus" in *Jacket* magazine (October, 2004): "I am after all a poet, not a responsible philosopher" (12).

¹⁸ Some of the writing in *Ruby* is found material, in other words existent texts selected from other sources and tailored to meet the needs of the composition. Atkins often applies the same principle of using found material in his poetic translations of *Petrarch* (2011), such as “Poem 186.” Here, Petrarch states how eternally great Laura is and how he imagines her effect on the classical heroes. Atkins’ poem places her in dialogue with, and imagines her through, the use of historical and contemporary writers by using a collage of famous first lines from a variety of texts that he found by surfing the Internet and by pulling random books from his bookshelf. As Atkins states in *The Seven Types of Translation* use of found text “brings to contemporary readers a vibrant, artificial, literary creation, similar [in certain aspects at least] to the Laura who appears in Petrarch’s original poem. Again, the game of recognition (for readers) of sources and the element of surprise in their combination, along with the overarching theme of literary love, makes up the key elements of [this kind of translation]” (85).

¹⁹ The “mode of glory” mentioned here is a reference to Basil Bunting’s Ode no. 36: “a glory neither of stone/nor metal, neither of words/nor verses, but of the light” (*Collected Poems* 173). I am making connections here between *Ruby* and the poetic translations of modernist writers such as Ezra Pound, Basil Bunting and of the British Poetry Revival, particularly Allen Fisher and Robert Sheppard, all of whom are alluded to in this poem. The fourth line is a reference to *Openned*, a poetry collective co-founded by Steven Willey and Alex Davies in 2006. This loose grouping of predominantly London-based poets worked almost entirely with innovative poetic forms. Willey and Davies hosted a poetry series of the same name which was convened at The Foundry, a temporary arts and music space in the basement of a former bank – hence the reference to “the vaults.” At these events,

which ran from 2007 to 2010, a number of poets performed innovative translations of older texts, including Tim Atkins, Caroline Bergvall and myself. This page also includes references to the innovative publishing house Barque Press and to the work of Jeff Hilson, with allusions to his sequence *Bird bird* (2009). One common thread in the work of all these poets, and reflected here, is a focus on or acute awareness of poetry as concerned with the process of perception, consciousness or the putting into language of language itself, rather than on what is perceived or experienced – “songs not of stone . but of light.” The events, objects and emotions represented in the language of *Ruby* are important, but not as important as the language itself. I would argue that in this respect *Ruby* is an example of language-centred writing that operates in what I describe here as “the mode of glory.”

²⁰ From Bunting's translation of an untitled Manuchehri poem (*Bunting's Persia* 47-49): “Before morning night was blacker/ for the white snow wasting away/and out of the hard ground rose a mud like fishglue” (48).

²¹ There are allusions, particularly with “a policy of time,” to Allen Fisher’s poetic sequence *Gravity as a Consequence of Shape* (2004). In Robert Sheppard’s essay “New Memories: Allen Fisher's Gravity as a Consequence of Shape” on his blogsite, Sheppard points out that the “pertinent poetry for Allen Fisher demands that it deconstructs consistent and chreodic memory.” ‘Chreod’ is a biological term that means a necessary path, whose charge is canalised once started in a certain direction. Fisher both describes and enacts this process in the text “Philly Dog,” part of *Gravity as a Consequence of Shape*, which Sheppard points out is “located in multi-dimensional space-times in which crossovers correspond to catastrophes folds on the surface that suspend descriptive referential functions and any temporal character of my experience and lead into a world unfolded by every narrative.” As in *Gravity as a*

Consequence of Shape, through techniques of textual rupture and jumps, *Ruby* intuitively invents new memories – memory becomes a reinvigorated invention of perception. The techniques of creative linkage involve the construction of multiple othernesses, from different times and places, along with a resultant polyphony of voices. Critically, when I apply these techniques, they disturb any propensity for consistency or a single referent in the discourse. In other words, I have used the pathways of chreodic memory in *Ruby* through a series of catastrophic, yet poetically provocative, crossovers.

²² I frequently use a punctuation mark in *Ruby*, which I call the “punctum.” The term was used by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) – see page 183 for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between my punctum and Barthes’ term. It resembles a full stop, and its effect is to create a pause in the middle of a line, which is approximately the same duration as a caesura. The punctum is reminiscent of a similar mark used by American poet Robert Duncan in some of his later work, such as in *Ground Work II: In the Dark* (1987). It is virtually the only punctuation mark I use in the poetic passages of *Ruby* (i.e. the text on the right hand side). My use of a single punctuation marking is rooted in a desire to create simplicity and unity throughout the work, allowing the words to speak for themselves and to connect with each other, with the minimum of restriction from the formal rules of writing. In Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960), Duncan argues that a “longing grows to return to the open composition in which the accidents and imperfections of speech might awake intimations of human being [without restriction]... I work at language as a spring of water works at the rock, to find a course, and so, blindly. In this I am not a maker of things, but, if maker, a maker of a way. For the way is itself” (402). *Ruby* is a continuation of Duncan’s poetics of

punctuation, with the spring of water being as unencumbered as possible on its journey to find a course.

²³ A reference to my earlier poetic sequence, *Lion* (2010): “Iran is like a hall of mirrors/the more you see . the more you think you understand/the less you understand” (37).

²⁴ Benjamin (5). According to Benjamin, the act of translation is actually two acts, one from the position of established meaning and one from the position of a new translation act, which seeks to challenge current understandings. It is as a result of this encounter that a dialogical relationship occurs and that something new is learned and re-learned.

²⁵ This is a reference to Olson’s long narrative sequence *The Maximus Poems* (1968). *Maximus* is an epic of place, centred on the city of Gloucester Massachusetts in the twentieth-century but mediated through the voice of Maximus, an imagined figure partly based on Maximus of Tyre, an itinerant Ancient Greek philosopher, and partly on Olson himself. I am not seeking to emulate the epic scale of *Maximus*, but I am interested in its meshing of geographies and histories and *Ruby* reflects this interest, for instance with my transference of Khayyam to the modern-day west where I “come back to the geography of it,/ the land falling off to the left” (109). As in Allen Fisher’s *Place* (2005), the aim in *Ruby* is to strike down through the layers of history that exist at specific geographical places. I attempt to ‘place’ the reader not just within a specific locale, but within its multiple and interconnected layers of cultural and political history. I also aim to make connections between the histories of locations that may be more or less familiar to the reader. As with *Maximus*, *Ruby* is simultaneously a study of the past and the present as well as the familiar and the unfamiliar.

²⁶ This stanza is clearly not set in medieval Nishapour, with its references to a car, a mobile telephone and, equally unconvincingly, seagulls (Khorasan province is land-locked). This is all the more strange given that the previous stanza suggests another more Eastern place. There is a deliberate mixing up of locations as a means of defamiliarisation. See note 70 (158), for a more detailed discussion of how I apply defamiliarisation to *Ruby*.

²⁷ (Benjamin 8). Translation in *Ruby* attempts to disarticulate the original. It is in a sense a pure language that is only concerned with language, often deliberately dismantling or at least disrupting meaning. As Paul de Man states in his Cornell lecture, “Conclusions: The Task of The Translator” (1983), “what translation does, by removing the burden of meaning, is [bring] to light what Benjamin calls “die Wehen des eigenen”—the suffering of what one thinks of as one’s own—the suffering of the original language” (37). Re-interpretative translations such as *Ruby* reveal, according to de Man, a suffering or alienation that is at its strongest when it is in relation to our own language and culture, and when the original language is disarticulated in a way that confronts us with our own alienation.

²⁸ In his *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography* (1955), Guy Debord defines psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (13). The psychogeographic approach taken here is one of trans-geographic and trans-temporal relocation. Tim Atkins follows the same principle at times in his poetic translations of *Petrarch* (2011), by re-fashioning medieval Italy into modern-day Britain. In common with *Petrarch*, *Ruby* is a disruption and re-connection of historical and geo-cultural elements. Geographically, *Ruby* is simultaneously located in Britain and the Middle East, sometimes

highlighting similarities and differences between the two places, but mostly simply revelling in the rich specificity of the language the two places generate – “these multiples . they enriches us.”

²⁹ Nishapour is a town in eastern Iran and Omar Khayyam’s birthplace.

³⁰ This is a reference to Hilson’s *Bird bird*, which uses the Latin names of bird species as starting points for a series of poetic explorations. I am making connections between Hilson’s expositions of language and the earlier poetry of Khayyam, in other words “discovering our / life before . the / bird . bird” is a key preoccupation of *Ruby*.

³¹ There is no single holy city that I am referencing here, although Khayyam will have made journeys to Mecca and perhaps Jerusalem prior to the First Crusade. By saying that “he always says it’s a holy city” I am hinting that the spiritual journey of *Ruby* is not geographical or theologically fixed but rather contingent and theoretical (or perhaps more precisely it could be described as ”theo-heretical”).

³² (Benjamin 9). According to Benjamin, a translation should engage with the “aura” of a foreign text, enacting an interpretation that is informed by a history of reception (“the age of its fame”). This interpretation does more than transmit messages; it recreates the values that accrued to the foreign text over time. Gelley writes in his essay “Contexts of the Aesthetic in Walter Benjamin” (1999): “In a way that is characteristic of Benjamin's manner of displacing a conceptual register, aura functions not so much as a concept or idea but rather as a differential marker, a means of situating phenomena in light of their historical lapse. In speaking of aura one already acknowledges being situated in a post-auratic phase” (5). My point in raising this is not to pursue a discussion of this notoriously knotty notion but to highlight that the exchange and renewal between two cultural subjects are very much

at play in Benjamin's reflections on translation and this is reflected in my poetics as manifested in *Ruby*. Consistently throughout *Ruby* there are two cultural traditions in dialogue with one another and informing one another, and as I write in the third stanza on the right hand side, it is as if “the east and west chatter/reminding and redeeming/masking layers of time.”

³³ This line is an allusion to the ancient Zoroastrian belief that the world is supported on the horns of a bull. In astronomy, the Seven Sisters, or Pleiades, is a cluster of stars that lie adjacent to the constellation Taurus the Bull.

³⁴ A line from “Apus Apus” in Hilson’s *Bird bird* (12).

³⁵ I make a reference here to the concept of a modern-day Ashik, the wandering poet/musician or troubadour, and the assertion that the Khayyam of *Ruby* is such an individual. The Ashik is, at a conceptual level, merely a regional manifestation of a widespread cultural phenomenon, that of “the wise fool.” See note 117 (175) for a more detailed discussion of the concept of the wise fool. Khayyam as an Ashik is no exception to this tradition. Like many wise fools before him, he is an outsider existing on the fringes of the political and cultural establishment. He operates beyond the jurisdiction of the laws of the mainstream, beyond even its linguistic rules. He is also a traveller, an itinerant storyteller who works his tales by knitting together his experiences from his travels. Finally, he is a mystic and a sorcerer, with the power to smelt and monger words in the same way a Blacksmith morphs his metals. In short, he is foolhardy enough to venture into the lawless territories between linguistic and literary traditions and through his folly he offers the reader access to other worlds – “I am the edges brother . breathe through me.”

³⁶ From Jacques Derrida’s “What is ‘Relevant’ Translation?” (177). Derrida addresses the issue of translation most explicitly in this essay. He is treating the term

“relevance” which is primarily used in translation by Ernst-August Gutt, for instance in his study *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (1992). Although Derrida does not directly mention Gutt’s work, he criticises the concept of relevance in translation. For Derrida, relevant translation relies on the supposed stability of the signifier-signified relationship. With his own translation of a line from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* he challenges this stability and promotes translation approaches that are more playful, ambiguous and inter-textual. As Jeremy Munday points out in *Introducing Translation Studies* (2008), “it can be argued that Derrida’s knowledge of translation studies was restricted, his linguistic and cultural critique of the text add a depth and currency that enhances the description of the translation process” (171). Similarly with *Ruby* I am less concerned with relevance *per se*, and more pre-occupied with creating links between multiple cultural threads. I am especially interested in weaving together medieval Persian poetics, twentieth-century British and North American experimental writing and contemporary Middle Eastern culture – however relevant, irrelevant or irreverent these threads might be.

³⁷ “Salaam” is the word for “peace” in Arabic, and is often used as a greeting in Iran; a shortening of “Salaam Aleikum.” This line is partly an allusion to my poem “Salaam Aleikum,” in *The Wire and Other Poems* (2012), where I critique the highly ironic ways in which the term is used in speeches by some of the least peaceful political leaders of the Middle East. Here in *Ruby*, I am presenting an alternative meaning that rekindles the peaceful utopian origins of the word, but also playfully introduces, through the addition of wine, an Epicurean spirit.

³⁸ Olson: “I was so young my first memory was of a tent spread to feed lobsters” (*Maximus* 110). Khayyam’s name means tent-maker, which may have been the occupation of his father.

³⁹ This line is a corruption of a couplet from the Sohrab Sepehri poem “Lost” in *The Eight Books* (1976): “ahle Kaashaanam / ammaa shahre man Kashaan nist” – which translates as “I come from Kashan / but Kashan is not my city” (97). The line alludes to psychogeographic loss, or more specifically a loss of sense of personal identity through alienation from place. Sepehri continues that “my city has lost / lost me / to a frenzy of other houses, other beds” (24).

⁴⁰ A line from my poem “War on Terror”, part of the sequence *The Lexico Project* (2010).

⁴¹ Derrida, from “Unsealing (‘the old new language’)” in *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*. (116). Derrida argues that writers have at their disposal a vast array of cultural “relays” (newspapers, journals, books, media) and it is their responsibility to unpack and retransmit these relays in original and creative ways.

⁴² A line from my poem “The Edges”, part of the sequence *The Lexico Project* (2010).

⁴³ This is a reference to the poet and translator Pierre Joris’s statement in *A Nomad Poetics* (2003) that “there is no difference between inside and outside at the poem’s warp speed” (92). Joris argues that it is “in-between” original and translated texts that we gather a rounder and more textually rich understanding of poetry, particularly the poetry of another language. It is a poetics that reads and understands language “horizontally,” to use Joris’s term, and one that allows him to view the poetry of the Maghreb, the poetry of Pound, Robert Duncan, Olson, and his own poetry as contemporaneous and involved in an ever-deepening conversation about

language. Joris explores this notion from his own written languages of French, German, and English and also Arabic—and not just Arabic as a language but in the way that an ethnographer must investigate how the language functions in a culture and environment. To that end as a translator, Joris argues that his task is to piece together the threads of the “textum” as he terms it, the invisible threads of language that are woven together to create the final document. In the case of Maghrebi writers such as novelist Driss Chraïbi, it is the *langue fourche*, the “forked tongue,” that draws Joris’s attention. Joris takes into account the choice to write in the language of the coloniser, French, while remaining on the lookout for the “ghostings of Arabic” in the writing: “The coloniser’s language too is caught in an irresolvable double bind: no language is a house the writer can simply inhabit, the only home is found in the ever-shifting force field of the spaces of its internal contradictions.” This is a “basic law of nomadcity,” as Joris calls it in his book of essays *Justifying the Margins* (11).

⁴⁴ Derrida (“What is a ‘Relevant’ Translation” 177). In addition to the importance of this essay as a critique of relevance in translation, it is interesting to note the method used to translate the text into English. It is effectively a collaboration between Derrida and the translation scholar Lawrence Venuti. Venuti’s translation often retains “technical” terms from the original French text in parentheses. Also Venuti adds an introduction to his translation, a further permutation of re-writing or re-interpreting, in which Venuti describes his own translation strategy, highlighting his frequent use of the original French in parentheses, “even when [it threatens] to twist the English into strange new forms” (174).

⁴⁵ Pers is an archaic name for Persia, as used in the ancient capital of the Persian Empire, Persepolis.

⁴⁶ A reference to Joris's essay "On the Nomadic Circulation of Contemporary Poetic" in *Justifying the Margins* (19). As Peter Cocklebergh points out in his review of *Justifying the Margins* in *Jacket* magazine (2010), "book boundaries are literally not drawn, permeated, obfuscated even, which allows the final and first sections of *A Nomad Poetics* and *Justifying the Margins*, respectively, to function, as said, as a sort of "transit zone" (2).

⁴⁷ This alludes to Robert Hampson's poetic sequence *an explanation of colours* (2010), which blends political and lyrical elements together within a series of poems "about" colours. In *an explanation of colours* Hampson uses colours in each poem as a starting point for a broader discourse which uses experimental language as its medium. I apply the same method in *Ruby*, for instance in part one where I write of "evergreens" that I describe as the "beginning end of things . we talk . always less" (36). Part one of *Ruby* is in one sense an extrapolation of this definition of evergreens, a playful discourse on its symbolism, particularly its fragile continuity: "evergreens dies too . sometimes" (41).

⁴⁸ This stanza refers to the poem "The Boat" by Modernist Persian poet, Nima Yushij (1923). In his biographical essay "Nima Youshij and New Persian Poetry" (2000), Bashiri argues that there is a "middle zone" (5), which appears recurrently in "The Boat." This "middle zone" is an imagined cultural territory between the Middle Eastern and Western worlds. There is also a reference in Yushij's poem to the concept of the sea and sea-shore as a psychogeographic "no man's land" – a theme I also explore here and elsewhere in *Ruby*.

⁴⁹ From Derrida, *Monolingualism and the Other* (40).

⁵⁰ I cross-reference Khayyam's spiritual and physical journeys, often to the west (to Isfahan for instance) with Japanese poet Matsuo Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, originally written in the seventeenth century in haibun form.

⁵¹ The reference here to "gin" makes a link between oxygen and alcoholic spirits, but is also a play on the term "jinn" who are the mystical spirit figures of Islam, sometimes called genies in the West.

⁵² The text here is from one of my previous compositions called "The Wire" from *The Wire and Other Poems* (4). By revisiting "The Wire" I connect to a key point in my poetic journey, but also reflect on the recurrent nature of some of the themes in my work. Like *Ruby*, "The Wire" is partly set in Jerusalem, and both pieces of work attempt to link classical Middle Eastern literary texts to contemporary British and North American poetry through the medium poetic translation.

⁵³ A reference to the concept of negative capability as a vehicle for lyrical poetry. The term was first used by the Romantic poet John Keats to critique those who sought to categorise all experience and phenomena and turn them into a theory of knowledge. It has more recently been appropriated by philosopher and social theorist Roberto Mangabeira Unger to comment on human nature and to explain how human beings innovate and resist within confining social contexts. The concept has also inspired psychoanalytic practices and twentieth-century art and literary criticism. See Unger's *Passion: An Essay on Personality* (1984) for a more detailed discussion on the social aspects of negative capability.

⁵⁴ Derrida, ("What is a 'Relevant' Translation" 177). There is a quasi-religious mysticism that permeates Derrida's words here, and reflects some of the religious preoccupations of *Ruby* as a whole. Derrida's essay highlights a sense of

“justice” coming from translation, whether it is “doing justice” to the original spirit of a text, or achieving some form of cultural emancipation by rejecting the unjustified reliance on a notion of relevance. In his book *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (1997), John Caputo promotes the view that Derrida’s use of the notion of justice is a playful proxy for God. Caputo argues that in reading Derrida “I cannot say whether God is a translation of justice, so that when I pray and weep over justice I am praying and weeping over God [...] but faith is a translation for something with an unknowing *non-savior sans savoir*, which is such that I cannot say what is a translation of what” (338). Similarly I never mention God directly in *Ruby*, but I do explore issues such as justice, faith and cultural freedom as a means of “under stand ing the uni verse.”

⁵⁵ This is a reference to Hilson’s *Bird bird* that highlights the value of intra-lingual translation, shifting the register of etymology to contemporary London vernaculars.

⁵⁶ Reflecting the astronomical theories of Ptolemy, it was widely believed at the time of Khayyam that there were seven planets in the night sky and that, like all other celestial objects, they revolved around the Earth. See M.C Mahoney’s “Ptolemaic Astronomy in the Middle Ages” in J.R. Strayer’s *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (1990).

⁵⁷ Ultimately, *Ruby* is only part of much bigger story: one with a countless variety of narrative outcomes. In *ABC of Reading TRG* (1999), Peter Jaeger highlights the value of multiple narratives as a means of engaging with a larger contextual and critical universe. He reviews Derrida’s grammatology and its implications on the work of the Toronto Research Group on rational geomancy and macrosyntax. He asserts that in a universe of disunified multiplicity “the writer can

never know the entire macrosyntactic context from which her readers draw ... in their account writing is reading and vice versa” (31). This disunity is an agent for radical critique, which goes beyond the specificity of any individual motif. I attempt to engage in such a critique in *Ruby*, by presenting a range of alternative narratives and outcomes that are sufficiently ambiguous to allow readers to connect the text with their own contexts. In the last part of *Ruby* I state this desire more explicitly: “these are y(our) sounds and syn(tax) / y(our) con(text)s / in pieces” (124).

⁵⁸ A visual approach is taken in this stanza, with just two words being broken up and contracted to create a minimalist visual effect. In one respect this is reminiscent of the *shekasteh* poetry of medieval and early modern Iran, where words in Arabic calligraphy are placed at seemingly random points around the page. The *shekasteh* form was an early example of a disjunctive style being used in poetry to subvert and at least defamiliarise standard poetic forms. It was popular at times of social alienation or division, such as during the Persian Civil Wars of the seventeenth century – see Alice Taylor’s *Book Arts of Isfahan: Diversity and Identity in Seventeenth Century Persia* (1995), for a more detailed discussion on this point (59-64). Another strong influence here is the visual poetry of bpNichol, such as in *The Aleph Beth Book* (1971). As Karl Young points out in his essay on Nichol’s concrete poetry (1998), “Nichol loved to start everything over from scratch, from the simplest, most common materials. Classic concrete gave him the opportunity to do that for a time [with an emphasis on] the Roman alphabet and [...] simple words repeated” (3). As with Nichol’s concrete poetic work, *Ruby* seeks to find a musicality in simple visual arrangements, and hints at a spiritual sub-narrative, through sparse and meditative sounds and sound-breaks.

⁵⁹ From Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" which first appeared in the magazine *Manteia* (3), and later in an anthology of Barthes' essays, *Image-Music-Text* (142). Barthes argues here against the method of reading and criticism that relies on aspects of the author's identity – their political views, historical context, religion, ethnicity, psychology, or other biographical or personal attributes – to distill meaning from the author's work. In this type of criticism, the experiences and biases of the author serve as a definitive "explanation" of the text.

⁶⁰ Is the study of literature an archeology? Is it an examination of the end-products of cultural experiences that are now essentially dead, leaving nothing behind other than symbols and the messages that lie behind these symbols? In his first work, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Barthes argues that literary analysis was essentially a posthumous affair. He contends that "literature is like phosphorous, it shines with its maximum brilliance at the moment when it attempts to die" (73). Unlike metals such as iron or steel, which are constantly remoulded and revived, phosphorous burns fast and gives the impression of impermanence. It leaves its mark on the senses and on the memory of those that have seen it shine, but in itself it is sparks quickly to its own death.

⁶¹ The reference to "field flowers" points to the poetry and poetics of Robert Duncan. In *The Opening of the Field* (1960), Duncan employs a reoccurrence of words and images, an overlapping of patterns and associations, and a forward-moving yet reiterative development of ideas. This is evident in his individual poems but also in the overall movement and organisation of the book. When *The Opening of the Field* first appeared, ten years had already passed since Charles Olson published *Projective Verse* (1950) and though many of Olson's tenets are obviously connected to the style and mode of Duncan's writing, the book is a significant technical

departure from Olson's "FIELD COMPOSITION." Duncan places himself "into the open" as Olson puts it in "Projective Verse," in terms of line, stanza, and overall form, and "applies the large area of the poem as the FIELD where, all the syllables and all the lines must be managed in their relations to each other" (2). Yet this form of poetic composition is entirely transformed in Duncan's writing. Duncan had a very specific idea in mind of what the theme of "the field" was meant to invoke. Duncan gives an explanation of its meaning in his 1958 Guggenheim application: "... the field was of a three-fold nature, 'known intimately as the field of my own life, intellectually as the field of language (or spirit), and imaginatively as the field given to [all humanity] which spans many languages'"(17). For Duncan, the word continuously shifts inside its web of associations, beginning with the alteration that occurs in rendering the book's title out of the term "open field." He contends that "the field" of the title itself becomes the physical space of "a meadow" in the opening poem but that this is only one of the many changes in figuration that the word undergoes in *The Opening of the Field*: "the sun's field," "the field of accumulated good," "a field of rapture," "my lovely field," each of these phrases echoing the nature of all human visions as they come to us "in a disturbance of words within words / that is a field folded" (19). I appropriate the notion of the field in *Ruby* as a landscape in which words can be transferred between languages and literary traditions. This is a field that as Duncan states, "spans many languages," but critically it is a place on the edge of these languages. Words and sounds are exchanged here with or without their original meanings. There is a disturbance not only of words but of the meanings of words. This is a "field of flowers" but also a place both real and imagined, a place both of nature and of the mind, a "made up" place where "lang guages . ex changes." It is a place that takes on the very contours

of reality but ultimately challenges them through its broken narratives: “scythe . smiles . stories.”

⁶² This line alludes to the modernist Iranian writer Forough Farrokhzad’s poem “The Wind Will Carry Us” published posthumously in her selected poems *Rebirth* (1998).

⁶³ This stanza highlights the need to move away from fidelity in order to inject creativity into the translation process. As the Toronto Research Group argue in their analysis of translation in *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine* (1992), stepping away from the preoccupation with fidelity is itself a creative act (32).

⁶⁴ From Barthes (*Image* 144), the “him” in this passage is the poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Barthes discusses the presence of the idea of authorial death in the works of previous writers, and cites Mallarmé as a poet who stated that poetry “is language which speaks” for itself and directly to the reader.

⁶⁵ This stanza alludes to Canadian poet Fred Wah’s “First Personal Poem” (1976). In his essay “Diminishing the Lyric I – Notes on Fred Wah & the Social Lyric” in *Open Letter* (3), Louis Cabri highlights how Wah diminishes the importance of the “I” in his lyrical poetry as a means of injecting social reflexivity. As Cabri puts it, there are some poets such as Wah “who accept the necessity or historical fact of social encodings in order to further both a fundamental critique of, and change upon their existing ordering [...] these poets sometimes diminish the lyric I specifically so as to reflexively re-introduce the social into the lyric” (82). This is also the approach I take in *Ruby*, moving away from the Romantic personal ego and limiting the frequency and power of the “I.” Instead, I maintain what Cabri calls “lyrical impulse” (79), by creating an expansive elemental field rich in

intertextuality in order to articulate social conditions – as I write in the last stanza on this page, “fire works and bon fires . im pulse we share.”

⁶⁶ The “sea rose” motif is taken from the work of H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) from the poem of the same name in her collection *Sea Garden* (1916). It is in a sense a re-invention of the “Golestan” (literally “rose garden”) or the classical Persian notion of the rose as a conduit for romantic expression through heightened lyricism. The rose of H.D. is a rose but not as the Persians would know it. Compared to traditional notions of the rose, the sea rose carries a “complex of emotion,” as Ezra Pound puts it, “suggesting a new, or more precisely a renewed way of being, free from the accumulations of sentimentality, a sparse, hardened, ‘pagan’ renewal of spirit” (95). In his essay “On ‘Sea Rose’” (1996), Michael Boughn argues that like Pound’s rose in the steel dust, William Carlos Williams’ obsolete rose or Gertrude Stein’s rose, H.D.’s sea rose also speaks to a tradition of writing. The rose is not only a rose; it is an inescapable convention of writing that even an assertion such as Stein’s “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” in her 1913 poem “Sacred Emily” necessarily invokes. As Boughn puts it, “if only in its attempt to negate it, the sea rose proposes a new imagination of that convention, one that resonates with the renewed spirit” (3).

⁶⁷ The original *Rubaiyat* was scattered with references to wine and drinking, particularly within the context of some form of epicurean oblivion, and with a strong undertone of the fulfillment of sexual desire. However Nasrollah Pourjavady argues in “Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism” (1999), that another metaphorical reading revolves around the notion of wine as a driver for change and transformation, and a rejection of the conventional order (615). There is a sense here of what Bakhtin describes in his essay “Carnival and Carnavalesque” as the “carnivalistic sense of the world” (*Rabelais* 2). To Bakhtin, carnival is not so much a performance, as a means

of separating the performer from the restrictions of the everyday world – as he points out, "the world standing on its head," the world upside down (4). The carnival for Bakhtin is an event in which all rules, inhibitions, restrictions and regulations that determine the course of everyday life are suspended, and especially all forms of hierarchy in society. Wine is an integral part of this suspension of everyday life. In her web essay "Sequins, Heels and Tiaras" (2010), Desiree D'Alessandro argues that through allusions to the mythology surrounding Dionysus and Jesus, Bakhtin stresses the importance of wine as an agent of change, "the dying god is reborn." Whilst wine drinking has to a certain extent always been a part of Iranian culture, at the time of Khayyam, there had been a significant clampdown on the previous more relaxed attitudes to alcohol. Under the auspices of the jurist Sahih Al-Bukhari, many wine taverns were closed down and their merchants banished or imprisoned. In this context, my wine references in *Ruby* are not an acceptance of oblivion, but a provocative and subversive rejection of it. See Najmieh Batmanglij, *From Persia to Napa: Wine at the Persian Table* (2006), for a more detailed discussion of this historical context (24-26).

⁶⁸ Another form of translation used in *Ruby* is one based on homophonics. In this instance the original Persian is "as kuzeh" which literally means "from the jug" but I have translated it to match the sounds to English words as closely as possible. The resultant translation, "ask you say" does not convey the original meaning directly but sits quite effectively within the structure of the quatrain as a whole. Hilson points out that "homophonic translation, the separation of words into their phonemic constituents, forces the translator to move along a horizontal axis of association rather than attending to the vertical axis of substitution" (*Music, Text and Translation* 92). The horizontal axis leads to a more considered attention of the

relations between words and highlights and their denotative rather than connotative values. Hilson derives this notion of denotative values from Charles Altieri's "The Objectivist Tradition" where Altieri distinguishes between a Symbolist mode of attention to language, which is broadly connotative, and an Objectivist mode, which is largely denotative (29). Moving along the horizontal axis, as Hilson describes it, can be powerful, even explosive. Indeed, on first examination, I misread denotation as detonation and certainly in the case of *Ruby* I argue that detonative as well as denotative value gives the homophonic translations their resonance. I use the misinformation that these sound transfers to create as a way of detonating potentially new and unexpected intertexts, and creating links between the languages and poetic traditions.

⁶⁹ This stanza is entirely written in Persian and there is no significant attempt at providing translational markers, apart perhaps from the use of the Latin script (Persian is normally written in a modified version of the Arabic alphabet) and the first line "yerushaalem," as some readers might discern, means Jerusalem. I deliberately use a Latin transliteration here as I have designed it to be read aloud and I have tried to make the phonetics as straightforward to follow as possible. My aim is for the non Persian-speaking reader to still be able to read out the text and thus to potentially engage with the sounds and rhythms of the language even if they cannot understand the words. There is a parallel here to Khayyam's own travels to places of pilgrimage, where folklore has it that he found himself surrounded by people he describes as "holy men" speaking a language he did not understand. See Amin Maalouf's *Samarkand* (1988) for a description of a (fictionalised) journey by Khayyam such as this. I have no desire, however, to suggest that there is a mystical quality to this speech act. I am simply taking the opportunity to connect with another

culture at a non-lexical level: “they speak their tongue and I listen . there is no magic here.” Bergvall applies a similar approach in her work “Cropper” (2006) which includes phrases and sentence in Norwegian. Bergvall never translates or hints at the meaning of these phrases, but their repetitive nature and their abrupt rhythms suggest a certain intensity that contrasts with the English in the poem, and thus creates, as with my poem, a kind of cross-cultural linguistic engagement that is not dependent on meaning.

⁷⁰ The bending of branches that I mention here symbolise the bending of words and meanings in *Ruby*, based on techniques of defamiliarisation. Defamiliarisation is the technique of presenting common things in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar. The term “defamiliarisation” was first coined by Victor Shklovsky in his essay “Art as Technique” (1917). Shklovsky invented the term as a means to “distinguish poetic from practical language on the basis of the former’s perceptibility” (209). The methods of defamiliarisation I use in *Ruby* involve a fragmentation of literary styles, language, and speech registers. Punctuation is largely abandoned. Words and phrases are broken and left unfixed, or joined to neighbouring words in unnatural ways. Literary forms are changed and mixed together and the narrative is often broken or disrupted. Overall there is a deliberate effort to create a sense of defamiliarisation through dislocation, fragmentation and dysfunctionality. This defamiliarisation in *Ruby* promotes a desire for reconnection with *The Rubaiyat*, but in new and surprising ways. It influences perceptions of the design and structure of both texts, with the use of potentially unexpected sounds, inconclusive and abstract narratives, and with a multi-directional perspective on place and time. At one level, the aim of this defamiliarisation is to decontextualise *Ruby* by shifting it away from *The*

Rubaiyat both in terms of its form and its content. A new narrative structure is devised, for instance, which assembles the work around an imaginary journey, ostensibly by a subject figure not entirely dissimilar to Omar Khayyam, but potentially re-located in the twenty-first century. For a discussion of the impact of defamiliarisation on contemporary experimental poetry, see the essay “Avant Garde or Endgame?” in Marjorie Perloff’s *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1).

⁷¹ From Barthes (*Image* 138). The limitations of semiological analysis become apparent when we explore the fringes of meaning. In “The Third Meaning,” Barthes offers a reflection on some stills taken from a scene of the Eisenstein film *Ivan the Terrible*. Barthes identifies two levels of meaning: the informational and the symbolic. However, he wonders whether this is all that exists: is there perhaps a third meaning – something else in the image that cannot be defined by the informational and the symbolic? He concentrates on an image of an old woman just before she is about to cry in ritualistic mourning. The expression on her face cannot be classified by any traditional semiological analysis: “The characteristics of this third meaning is to blur the separations between expressions but also to emphasise an artful disposition perfectly absorbed by Eisenstein himself when he jubilantly quotes the golden rule of the old Gillette: just short of the cutting edge!” (106). Strictly speaking, in semiological terms, the third meaning is meaningless because it cannot be assigned to a code. I apply this notion of third meaning in *Ruby* through my preoccupation with the very edge of meaning, the hinterland where words, registers, moods and so on are somehow transferred from another place into our language. It is often in unintentional links, such as homophonic connections, that the most interesting exchanges take place. As I write in the accompanying poetry on the right

hand side: “look beyond the cutting edge / daast on . is the stories . broken up” (73). The “daast” is the first syllable of the Persian word “dasstaan” which means “story” and the story is indeed fragmented, as is the word “daastan.” Yes there is a connection here with the English word “dust” even though there is no deliberate symbolic link between the two words.

⁷² In *The Invisible Kings* (2007), a collection of poems written by David Morley, an English writer of Romani descent, there is a deliberate desire to create a response amongst English-speaking readers to the folklore and literary vocabulary of the Romani. In the poem “The Kings,” Morley tells of the journeys and the trials of a gypsy Ashik, a Romani man of the Blacksmiths' tribe, the Boorgoodjides, who moves between the worlds of Roma and Gajo or non-Roma majority (9).

⁷³ Morley makes an emphatic and overt connection in *The Invisible Kings* with his ancestral traditions through the use of Romani words, registers, folklore etc. He also offers little touches of familiarity to non-Romani readers: such as the myth of the exotic gypsy with his metalwork, jewellery, superstition etc. However, for me the most important reference is when he says that he is “the king’s fool,” that he is at the unlawful edge of the world, where there is only “the laws of the hedgerows” (10). I investigate this fool more closely in *Ruby* where the fool is a useful companion on our journey in to the Hinterland.

⁷⁴ The king in question here is the historical Bahram V (420-438 AD) of the Sassanid dynasty, who was fond of hunting wild ass; indeed his nickname was “Bahram the Wild Ass.” The Persian word for wild ass, “gur,” also means “grave” and the close proximity of the “ass” and the “grave” in the second line of the stanza is an attempt to capture the spirit of the original pun, which is further emphasised through the phonic echoes of the ass in “assess” and to a lesser extent “palace.”

⁷⁵ The reference to “low windows” is a playful take on *High Windows*, a collection of poems by Philip Larkin (1974). Larkin was an ardent critic of Modernism and fought against avant-garde influence in British poetry, most notably through a poetry group that became known as “The Movement.” Peter Riley criticises Larkin in *Jacket* magazine (2004) for his indiscriminating and ideologically narrow position: “What after all were Larkin and The Movement but a denial of the effusive ethics of poetry from 1795 onwards, in favour of ‘this is what life is really like’ as if anyone thought for a second of simply representing observable ‘life’?” (34). For instance, in the poem “Going, Going,” Larkin expresses a romantic fatalism towards a notional England that anticipates the complete destruction of the countryside, and champions an idealised sense of national togetherness and identity: “And that will be England gone ... it will linger on in galleries; but all that remains for us will be concrete and tyres” (190). The poem ends with the blunt statement, “I just think it will happen, soon.” Yet in *Ruby*, England is not gone, whatever “will happen” has happened, but the church bells still ring, and that England will continue to “carry on . in a flurry of the new.”

⁷⁶ This line alludes to the Leonard Cohen song “Bird on the Wire,” included in his 1969 album *Songs from a Room*. In the 1960s, Cohen lived on the Greek island of Hydra with his girlfriend Marianne (the woman depicted on the back cover of *Songs from a Room*). She has related how she helped him out of depression by handing him his guitar, whereupon he began composing “Bird on the Wire” – inspired by a bird sitting on one of Hydra’s recently installed phone wires, followed by memories of wet island nights. Cohen is dealing here with the consequences of his own self-destructive and deeply melancholic Romanticism —with what Sandra Djwa calls “black Romanticism” (94). In common with “Bird on the Wire,” *Ruby* is a

form of catharsis or expiation, something associated with the dark night of the soul, but which seeks to overcome it through some sort of re-connection with older mystical traditions. For all the personal dark deviations and near despair that they acknowledge, Cohen carries on, Khayyam carries on, both in the style of jaded, reluctant prophets.

⁷⁷ In the original Khayyam rubai, the birds say “coo” which in the Persian also means “where” – the pun in my poem revolves around twitter – a more contemporary juxtaposition of bird song and social networking.

⁷⁸ This line is the name of one of my previous poems, which appeared in *The Wire and Other Poems* (22).

⁷⁹ This quatrain alludes to *The Conference of the Birds*, a poetic sequence of approximately 4500 lines written in Persian in the twelfth century by Farid ud-Din Attar. In the poem, the birds of the world gather to decide who is to be their king, as they have none. The hoopoe, the wisest of them all, suggests that they should find the legendary Simorgh, a mythical Persian bird roughly equivalent to the western phoenix. The hoopoe leads the birds, each of whom represent a human fault, which prevents man from attaining enlightenment. When the group of thirty birds finally reach the dwelling place of the Simorgh, all they find is a lake in which they see their own reflection. Besides being one of the most celebrated examples of Persian poetry, this book relies on a clever word play for instance between the words Simorgh, which is a symbol often found in sufi literature, and “si morgh”, meaning “thirty birds” in Persian, and which is a common basket *size of poultry birds being sent to slaughter in the Middle East*. There are obvious parallels here with Chaucer’s *Parliament of Birds*, although the two poems are not directly linked.

⁸⁰ Noctilucent clouds are astronomical phenomena that are the “ragged-edges” of a much brighter and pervasive polar cloud layer called mesospheric clouds in the upper atmosphere, visible in a deep twilight. They are made of crystals of water ice and are most commonly observed in the summer months at latitudes between 50° and 70° north and south of the Equator. They are thus very rare in the Middle East but reasonably common in Northern Europe, hence the reference to “a north land.”

⁸¹ Norouz is the Persian New Year, which falls on the Vernal Equinox.

⁸² The phrase “corridor of uncertainty” is taken from the former international cricketer and broadcaster Geoffrey Boycott who uses the term to describe an area where a cricket ball can pitch during a delivery, a narrow line on and just outside a batsman's “off stump.” The name is derived from the opinion that this is the area in which a batsman struggles most to determine whether to play forward or back, or whether to leave the delivery. In *Ruby* I would argue that every page has its own corridor of uncertainty running down the middle and separating the ‘philosophical’ prose on the left from the poetry on the right. The reader is constantly faced with the same dilemma as the batsman – whether to play the shot and engage with the philosophy or seek to protect the poetry – the rubais on the right. The prose is largely Western in origin, whilst the poetry has its roots in the Middle East. There is an analogy again here with cricket, a sport with strong link to the British Empire, and its attempts at cultural proselytisation. However it should be noted that recent studies suggest that cricket has its origins in the Ancient Egyptian game of Seker Hemet, and that it was introduced to Europe in the Middle Ages by gypsies travelling through Persia (Piccioni 12). These sporting contradictions reflect an uncertainty in *Ruby* between my engagement with the original texts and contexts, and my desire to

ground my work in Western literary theory. This unresolved anxiety is a central component of *Ruby*, “by its very nature . it stumps us” (85).

⁸³ There is a synecdochal hint at an authorial presence (“our hands did this”) but it is elusive (“on dust”). “Dust” is explicitly compared here with “daast” which is half the Persian word for story (“daastaan”) and close to the Persian word for hand (“dast”). Cross-linguistic ambiguity abounds, with the use of standard and dialectic English, Persian and a broken semi-intelligible meshing of English and Persian (“is daast on dust”). As Peter Robinson points out in *Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (2010), applying this type of meshing of linguistic references acts as a form of cultural transfer, a sharing of poetics across poetic traditions (103). Similarly in *Ruby* I am collapsing and reforming the words of more than one language to create a shared musicality that promotes the rhythms of two or more languages in one new and hybrid text.

⁸⁴ As well as being a poet, Omar Khayyam was an accomplished mathematician and astronomer. According to some accounts, Khayyam devised a new calendar in order to impress and aggrandise his Seljuk ruler. The Jalali calendar, named after the Sultan, is according to Edward Richards in *Mapping Time* (1998), more accurate to the mean tropical year than the Gregorian calendar that was devised some 500 years later (91). The modern Iranian calendar is based on his calculations, and Amin Razavi argues is central to Iran’s sense of national identity and cultural difference (38).

⁸⁵ I have taken the texts on the left hand side in this section from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1883). In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche explores, interprets and heavily embellishes the teachings of a Persian mystic and poet, Zarathustra. In this particular passage, Nietzsche presents Zarathustra as a

lonely wanderer and outcast in foreign lands, an Ashik (23). *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is important to *Ruby* because of the centrality of the concept of the Ashik in both works. Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a man on the fringes who seeks to unsettle and re-orientate the world through a mix of mystic insight, poetry and intuition. The Omar Khayyam of *Ruby* is doing much the same and the two men meet in this section, and exchange "the loneliness of the east and the west."

⁸⁶ From the Sanskrit, "thus spake the holy one," which is taken from the *Zandavesta*, the holy book of the Parsees, an Indian religious group who follow the teachings of Zarathustra. It is also from these words that Nietzsche derived the title of his book.

⁸⁷ "Baaraan" means "rain" in Persian.

⁸⁸ From Nietzsche (*Zarathustra* 23). Too much information causes indigestion of the spirit, according to Nietzsche; we shall "choke on our reason." In *Introducing Nietzsche* (1997), Laurence Gane argues that for Nietzsche, the knowledge we share must be relevant and useful to our specific cultural projects, and once shared this knowledge leaves us and enters a common epistemological space or knowledge bank (69). In this respect I am attempting in *Ruby* to provide an antidote to the overwhelming quantity of information available on *The Rubaiyat* by "finding a way through . my words my game my rules."

⁸⁹ The original *Rubaiyat* refers to Magian wine, in other words the cult of the Magi, an alternative name for Zoroastrian priests, who use wine as part of many of their religious ceremonies.

⁹⁰ Nietzsche: "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass man?" (*Zarathustra* 24): Nietzsche's notion of the Superman is sometimes misconstrued in evolutionary terms, in other words as

an inevitable development towards a superior lifeform – see for instance H.L. Mencken’s introduction to *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (37). Yet Nietzsche’s Zarathustra sees the Superman as far from inevitable – rather as an extreme challenge to the human spirit. Indeed, as Gane argues in *Introducing Nietzsche*, the Superman may never be realised, but Nietzsche insists that we have an obligation to strive towards it as it connects us with the “ultimate meaning of the earth” as he calls it. In *Ruby* I am making a connection between Nietzsche’s aspiration for the Superman, and the Sufic concept of universal wisdom, or the desire to become one with nature by achieving a transcendental state: “above us . above man/in the ways of water/and earth and.” Whilst alluding to Eastern mysticism, the Sufism of Ruby is firmly grounded in Western discourse. The “spirit of the Shah” in this passage is a reference to Idries Shah, who with works such as *Book of the Book* (1969), re-ignited interest Sufism in the West. In his writings, Shah presents Sufism as a universal form of wisdom that predated Islam. Emphasising that Sufism was not static but always adapting itself to the current time, place and people, he frames his teaching in Western psychological terms. As with Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, or my *Ruby*, Shah makes extensive use of traditional teaching stories and parables, texts that contained multiple layers of meaning designed potentially to trigger insight and self-reflection in the reader. Shah was at times criticised by Orientalists who questioned his credentials and background (84). His role in the controversy surrounding a new translation of *The Rubaiyat*, published by his friend Robert Graves and his older brother Omar Ali-Shah, came in for particular scrutiny. Peter Wilson wrote that if Shah had been a swindler, he had been an “extremely gifted one,” because he had taken the time to produce an elaborate and internally consistent “proxy for the East,” and had “provoked and stimulated thought in many diverse

quarters” (195). *Ruby*’s Sufism is a similar proxy, a re-invention based on a Western discourse seeking to re-connect with an Eastern text of dubious provenance, seeking to provoke and stimulate, although perhaps not in such diverse quarters.

⁹¹ The region of Persia that lies along the Tigris River, which is known today as Iranian Kurdistan, but which Khayyam would have known as Persian Iraq, was famed for its flute music at the time of the original Rubaiyat.

⁹² Nietzsche: “Ye have made your way from the worm to man, and much within you is still worm. Once were ye apes, and even yet man is more of an ape than any of the apes” (*Zarathustra* 24).

⁹³ I often use the technique of unfinished or “hanging” enjambments in *Ruby*, where I deliberately end a line abruptly with an incomplete phrase. The common expectation with enjambment is that there is some kind of continuation across lines and stanzas. The line ending in this respect is a form of control, where the flow of words is deliberately broken in order to emphasise a particular image or segment of the narrative. However my hanging enjambments are not sustained, which in itself is potentially unexpected and defamiliarises the subject of the work. It also encourages the reader to fill in the gaps and end the word flow themselves, or perhaps to reflect on its fractured and imperfect state. In his blog review of Alan Dugan’s poem “The Morning Here” (2005), Ron Silliman highlights the potential power and influence of the hanging enjambment. He argues that its effect, “because we expect the final word of one line to lead somewhere, is to minimise the gap between the end of one line and the start of the next. This is what I meant the other day when I referred to the concept of unfinished enjambment as a specific literary device & the idea has been haunting me since then.” Silliman compares Dugan’s work with that of James Schuyler and stresses that both poets “clearly don’t want you to hear that pause –

there are lines that read, in their entirety, on the skin so that become almost unless they recede almost to the point of invisibility. That recessiveness is absolutely necessary though, in order to foreground a deliberately askew syntax.” The key point with the approach I take with *Ruby* is that these hanging lines are often at the end of stanzas. They “recede to the point of invisibility” at the end of something, which allows the reader the opportunity to reflect on that that point, rather than minimise the space with the next line. The broken syntax is thus a quiet space for the reader, “a fragment of” whatever he or she wants it to be.

⁹⁴ From Nietzsche (*Zarathustra* 24). The body, in other words, is not the external tool of an inner sovereign mental ego, but an organism within which the ego, or mind, that plays a subordinate role. Nietzsche is not suggesting that the body cannot be transformed by the mind, but certainly it has the upper hand, and it would be foolish to suggest that it does not. There is also a suggestion here that this body connects with a super-organism, and that by accepting our subservience to our bodies, we are asserting the existence of a single connecting entity, “a uni verse” mentioned on the other side of the page.

⁹⁵ An allusion to a line from the Forough Farrokhzad poem “The Gift”, published posthumously in her selected poems *Rebirth* (1998), which begins with the line, “I speak out in the night.” Farrokhzad often used nature images at night-time to create a sense of desolation and alienation. There is also a quiet beauty and dignity in her imagery, the possibility of re-growth and reparation, which I emphasise here with the words “branches are hints of hope.”

⁹⁶ From Nietzsche (*Zarathustra* 26). The reference to a rope here is another connecting point between Nietzsche and the Ashik. The rope itself is a conceit that plays on the fragile link between the ordinary mortality of Man and infinite power of

the Superman. However, the rope also links the mainstream world of Man with the fringes of society, represented by the outcast Superman. The poetic side of *Ruby* makes productive use of this idea, with the Ashik also providing “a rope for / whispering home truths.”

⁹⁷ One intriguing historical *Rubaiyat* phenomenon was the emergence of Omar Khayyam clubs in the West at the end of the nineteenth century. These were private men’s dining clubs dedicated to the celebration of the poetry of Omar Khayyam. Members of these upper-class establishments would don faux Middle Eastern attire and be served wine by semi-dressed women in the style of the harem. As Michelle Kaiserlian argues in her paper “The Imagined Elites of the Omar Khayyám Club” (2011), these clubs became ritual spaces in which participants praised their own elite status and crafted a covert identity through the vehicle of *The Rubaiyat* and the imagined costumes and practices of the Middle East (Poole, Ruymbeke, Martin and Mason 172). Re-imagining ourselves through ritualistic play is still of relevance to *Ruby*: I playfully suggest here that the reader might want to do the same, because we “have hats too . places to play.”

⁹⁸ In Persian culture good fortune is associated with being awake and vigilant, in other words “eyes wide eyed.”

⁹⁹ A reference to Yushij’s poem “The Boat” (1923) – see note 48 (148), for more details on this. There is also a reference to the concept of the sea and sea-shore as a psychogeographic “no man’s land” – a theme I return to repeatedly in *Ruby* – see note 43 (146), for a further discussion on this topic.

¹⁰⁰ Persian wine bowls at the time of Khayyam often had a line of verse inscribed in the inside rim, which would only be revealed upon drinking the wine.

This is thus a conceit on the potentially revelatory and transcending effect of wine-drinking, even though it is an “all too brief effect.”

¹⁰¹ Jamshid is a mythical hero of Persian culture, appearing most notably in Ferdowsi’s tenth-century epic poem *The Shahnameh*. He was attributed a magic cup in which he could see past events, and all the places of the world and by which, rather like Joseph and his silver cup, he could predict the future.

¹⁰² In his autobiography *Ecco Homo* (1888), Nietzsche speaks of his experience of writing *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and how he at times felt like a mystical conduit, linking physical and spiritual worlds. He states: “if one had the slightest trace of superstition left in one, it would be hard to deny the idea that one is the incarnation, mouthpiece and medium of almighty powers” (101). Once again this idea of the poet-philosopher as a “medium” or “mouthpiece” is very relevant to *Ruby*, with its emphasis on Omar Khayyam as an example of a “middleman” connecting East and West in a new and radical ways, in other words: “the return / of the middle men . the danger men.”

¹⁰³ From Nietzsche (*Zarathustra* 258). This reference reflects Nietzsche’s notion of the circle of time, or the eternal recurrence of things. Nietzsche stresses the significance of our present actions – whatever we do now will return to us, again and again. It implies an exhortation that is deeply Sufic in quality: strive to be greater than you are, to overcome yourself, to “reach the realm of the clouds.” *Ruby* reflects this approach – Omar is unencumbered by the past – the present moment is what matters – and he attempts to make best use of it.

¹⁰⁴ The “x” here denotes the voiceless velar fricative, a type of consonantal sound used in most Middle Eastern Languages, including Persian. It is not commonly used in Modern English, although it occasionally appears as in the Scottish English

word “loch.” The voiceless velar fricative was part of the phonology of Old and Middle English but later disappeared from the English Language. Indeed, correct readings of Chaucer emphasise it in the pronunciation of words such as knight and wight (in which “gh” represents the voiceless velar fricative). This means that at the time of Khayyam, both Persian and English would have had the sound in common. However by the end of the fifteenth century it had largely been abandoned in the English language. There are various theories concerning the reasons for the decline in the voiceless fricative in English. In *Linguistic Change and the Great Vowel Shift* (1972), Patricia Wolfe argues that the loss of a number of consonants ran in parallel with a phenomenon known as the “The Great Vowel Shift,” when longer more French-sounding vowel patterns gave way to shorter or diphthongal phonemes (17). One theory for these phonological changes is that they were an assertion of Britishness at a time of prolonged conflict with France. The loss of the voiceless fricative is perhaps a rejection of the foreign, even if that foreignness results in cultural isolation and a rejection of the origins of the English language (90). By introducing this sound into *Ruby*, I am thus making a deliberate effort to reconnect the English language not just with other cultural traditions, but also with its own past.

¹⁰⁵ From Nietzsche (*Zarathustra* 258). This quotation reminds us of the transformational power that Nietzsche attributes to poetry. Nietzsche writes in “Through the Circle of Dionysos–Dithyrambem” that the poet “willingly and knowingly lies / can alone tell the truth” (*Zarathustra* 103). In *The Peacock and the Buffalo: The Poetry of Nietzsche* (2010), James Luchte argues that “the poet, through his or her own playful deceit, can disclose makeshift truths between earth and heaven, new lie/truths” (29).

¹⁰⁶ I allude here to Bergvall's *Meddle English* (2011), a contemporary response to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which in common with *Ruby* relies in part on appropriated texts. Bergvall for instance "transcribes" Carolee Schneemann's 1965 film *Fuses* and weaves it into her neo-Chaucerian narrative. In an introduction to *Fuses* on her website, Schneemann describes *Fuses* as a silent film of collaged and painted sequences of lovemaking between herself and her then partner, composer James Tenney, as observed by her cat, Kitch. In a web review of *Meddle English* in *The Constant Critic* (2012), Vanessa Place ponders the way in which works of appropriation (collage, transcription, etc.), instead of merely disavowing authorship as one might expect, tend to shore up the appropriator and re-inscribe the author. Place points out that "although *Meddle English* is a concerted performance of polyvocality, the only voice heard is Bergvall's. Bergvall is the only point of entry and departure for the book...there is Bergvall, acting as interlocutor and writer and performer." We are thrown, Place contends, back into the lap of the one who writes: "as in tongue, as in mouth, as in mind." Using the language of a mathematical proof, Place proposes the following tautology: "Bergvall proves Bergvall." Place is of course herself, through her own selection of texts, offering such a mathematical circularity (in other words "Place proves Place") but nonetheless the point she makes is pertinent to my approach to poetic translation. I follow a similar path in *Ruby*, becoming an active participant in the dialogue with the reader, and in my rejection of traditional notions of Middle Eastern poems in translation. At times, as in this section, the original Khayyam is superfluous in these efforts and like Bergvall, I take centre stage as writer and performer – "it is me who writes it . meddles . some times."

¹⁰⁷ Olson: "I have this sense,/that I am one/with my skin" (*Maximus* 111).

¹⁰⁸ From Bakhtin's essay "Epic and Novel" (1941), where he argues that the epics have their origins in an older oral song tradition, which allowed for greater fluidity in terms of the words, registers and narratives used (*Dialogic* 14).

¹⁰⁹ In parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, when a baby is born a quince tree is planted as a symbol of fertility, love and life.

¹¹⁰ This is a reference to Bakhtin's analysis of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* in which Bakhtin promotes *Eugene Onegin* as an example of poetry "which exemplifies the elusiveness of generic boundaries and the subversion of authorial intentionality through an engaged dialogue" (386). See note vi (22) for a more detailed account of Bakhtin's attitude to poetry.

¹¹¹ Bakhtin argues that time is specifically significant in this genre as it never effects change for the protagonist. Instead, "a logic of random disjunctions" or potentially unexpected but necessary events impinge upon and interact with the characters (*Speech Genres* 142). I use disjunctive sequences in *Ruby* in much the same way – Khayyam the protagonist exists independent of time and his character is not developed by the poetic sequences. Instead, I seek to enrich our understanding of Khayyam and his work through techniques such as defamiliarisation – see note 70 (158), for a more detailed discussion of this.

¹¹² Bakhtin argues in *The Dialogic Imagination* that language and literature are ever evolving "living" phenomena, which are moulded and changed by the texts produced within them. The meanings stemming from literature are adapted through a dialogue with the texts from which they originate. To Bakhtin, all forms of language have the capability to modify cultural forms using these dialogical means: "every utterance must be regarded as primarily a response to a preceding utterance [...]" language only lives in dialogical interactions of this kind" (91). By applying

dialogical principles using my axis of dialogical poetics, I attempt to create what Bakhtin described as “dialogical interactions” (91).

¹¹³ There are multiple references here to Sohrab Sepehri, and a deliberate parallel is being drawn here between Sepehri’s work and the work of the contemporary Irish American poet Marcus Slease. Sepehri is an important proponent of the modernist school of Persian poetry first described by Hamid Siahpoush in *The Lonely Garden: Sohrab Sepehri's Remembrance* (2003) as “the New Poetry” (11). With an emphasis on innovative poetic techniques and breaking down traditional forms, the New Poetry extends and refines the techniques of literary modernism to make them more relevant to the more informal registers of late twentieth century Persian. Complex in organisation, rich in vocabulary, *Eight Books* (1957) demonstrates the intricacies of Sepehri’s writing. As Siahpoush argues, Sepehri is usually present as protagonist-spectator yet his work expresses not his thoughts alone but, most of the time, a kind of collective consciousness; and hence many different forms and levels are negotiated but literal realism is immediately transcended (12). Similarly in *Hello Tiny Bird Brain* (2012), Slease varies in medium from normative prose to poetry that is highly elliptical, condensed, dislocated, and discontinuous. I point out in my review of *Hello Tiny Bird Brain* in *Hand & Star Magazine* (2012) that Slease brings to verse “a rhythm that is sometimes very strong—allusive, liturgical, or incantatory—but that never employs rhyme or any regular pattern.” The aim of both *Eight Books* and *Hello Tiny Bird Brain*, which I seek to emulate in *Ruby*, is to create a profound and shattering disclosure of combat’s physical destruction and spiritual outrage, which is sustained by a controlled and variegated tone which is disarmingly poignant whilst still being politically rousing.

¹¹⁴ From Bakhtin (*Dialogic* 422), in his essay “Discourse in the Novel.”

¹¹⁵ This is a misheard intra-lingual response to Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. In his essay "Not the novel: Bakhtin, poetry, truth, God" (2001), Graham Pechey argues that Blake's work epitomises a failed dialogism, with its anti-authorial expressivity merely replacing the old monologism of classical poetry with the equally hegemonic poetic signification of Romanticism. – "for Bakhtin, Romanticism breaks with the stylisation of the single voiced classicist word only to put in its place a yet purer monologism of utterance from which all hint of refraction from another's word has been eliminated" (72-73). I argue here that much contemporary experimental poetry, including *Ruby*, breaks down this kind of formalist conceptual vocabulary, partly through irony, parody and playful techniques such as this kind of mishearing.

¹¹⁶ From Bakhtin, in his essay "Methodology for the Human Sciences" (*Dialogic* 159).

¹¹⁷ This is a reference partly to Enid Welsford's notion of "the wise fool" in *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (1935) and partly to "the King's Fool" of David Morley in his sequence *The Invisible Kings*. The wise fool is a recurring character in many literary traditions. He appears throughout the history of English Literature in many guises: as the mascot, the scapegoat, the bard, the soothsayer, the Lord of Misrule, and even the prophet. It is beyond the scope of my discussion here to review all these manifestations, but as Enid Welsford argued in her 1935 classic on the subject, the fool is nearly always amongst us. In some ways, he undermines or stretches the norms of the dominant society, not simply for comic effect but also as a source of inspiration for his audience. For Welsford "he is a man who falls below the average human standard, but whose defects have been transformed into a source of delight and inspiration... through the application of his folly" (97). Morley's King's

Fool is no exception to this tradition. Like many fools before him, he is an outsider existing on the fringes of mainstream society. He operates beyond the jurisdiction of the laws of the Metropolis, beyond even its linguistic rules. He is also a traveller, an itinerant storyteller who works his tales by knitting together his experiences from his travels in two worlds: the Romani and domain of the Gajo. Finally, he is a mystic and a sorcerer, with the power to smelt and monger words in the same way Blacksmiths morph their metals. In *Ruby*, my wise fool is foolhardy enough to venture into the lawless territories between linguistic and literary traditions and through his folly he offers the reader access to other worlds, “doorways” to “a palace of traceries.”

¹¹⁸ Olson remarked in his poem “Human universe” that it is has “gone so far, that is science has, as to wonder if the fingertips, are not very knowing knots in their own rights, like little brains, like photo-electric cells, I think they now call them” (159).

¹¹⁹ Pechey (2001) argues that in one respect the discourse on Bakhtin’s attitude to poetry is itself a dialogical one, between Bakhtin and poetry (73). Poetry offers the possibility of what Bakhtin calls a “hidden polemic” (*Speech Genres* 34), through an allegorising poetic discourse which challenges Bakhtin’s notion that heteroglossia is sourced through prosaic rather than poetic utterance.

¹²⁰ Bakhtin argues that the body, particularly grotesque or realistic depictions of it, is a celebration of the cycle of life. The grotesque body is a comic figure of profound ambivalence, its positive meaning linked to birth and renewal and its negative meaning linked to death and decay. In *Rabelais and His World*, his study of *Gargantua*, Bakhtin stresses that in medieval epochs “it was appropriate to ridicule authority figures to use excrement to degrade” (189), and this was not to just mock,

but to unleash what Bakhtin saw as the people's power to renew and regenerate the entire social system. It was the power of the people's festive-carnival, a way to turn the official spectacle inside-out and upside down, just for a while; long enough to make an impression on the participating official stratum. With the advent of modernity, the mechanistic overtook the organic, and officialdom no longer came to join in festival-carnival. The bodily lower stratum of humour was thus separated and alienated from the upper stratum. In *Ruby* as in *Gargantua*, I seek to undermine this separation, and the carnivalesque signifies a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of dominant styles or forms through a kind of playful chaos.

¹²¹ In her essay "Bodymatters" (1989), Ann Jefferson argues that Bakhtin's notion of the body is best understood as a gift, as an act of aesthetic altruism on the part of the writer. By engaging with the body, I am engaging in an act of gathering. I am attempting to gather together some of the parts of the body the reader is unable to see – the reader's head, face, facial expression. Focusing on Bakhtin's early essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic activity" (1920), Jefferson also highlights "Bakhtin's repeated emphasis on the author's 'outsidedness' (his necessary otherness)" as a result of this act of gathering and giving (38). I would argue that the outsider, the Ashik if you will, is thus conceived from notions of the body just as much as he is from the geo-cultural contexts. In keeping with traditional notions of the Ashik, the lyric lies at the heart of this conception, as this self-imposed alienation is an act of love, a selfless act of affection and giving. As Bakhtin puts it, "love is the culmination of the aesthetic, the necessary condition – only love can be aesthetically productive" (*Dialogic* 123).

¹²² A reference to a collection of poems by Iranian poet Simin Behbahani, entitled *The Lute is Broken* (1951), which laments the decline of traditional Iranian

culture in the face of rapid modernisation and westernisation. I argue here that the breaking of the lute is a beginning rather than an end, an opportunity for new kinds of sounds, melodies and lyrics. As I say in the previous line, “the world rolls on” and we learn from its “new colours.”

¹²³ At this point, I use the sound effect to reassert the importance of the velar fricative in the English language and as a consequence create a new link with the Persian language. There is a crescendo of guttural noise that ends up sounding like radio interference, which is reflected in the next line. I give reassurance that this is “the right frequency” both in terms of finding the signal that creates East and West, but also that the rhythm of *Ruby* remains truthful and pertinent, that it achieves the “nishapour blues.”

¹²⁴ Esfand is an herbaceous plant found almost exclusively in the Middle East and Central Asia. Zoroastrian folk practices reflect a classical belief in the medical properties of esfand, while attributing a number of mystical properties to it. It is considered to be a divinely favoured plant, which can cure seventy-two varieties of ailments the most severe of which is leprosy. The smoke from its burning seeds is believed to ward off harm from persons or places that are exposed to its effects. Esfand is burned at potentially harmful moments such as during circumcision ceremonies or for the protection of a woman in childbirth. The burning of the seeds is accompanied by the recitation of a chant. Esfand is also occasionally encountered in Iranian folk medicine. For example, the practice of burning esfand seeds to avert the evil eye is widely attested in early classical Persian literature. The association of esfand with haoma (the sacred beverage of Zoroastrianism) may have influenced this practice. The continuity of Persian tradition has brought the ancient sacred plant into Islamic sources. An Islamic tradition states that there is an angel in each of the plant's

leaves and seeds. The apotropaic value of esfand is reflected in its burning against evil presence. In a ceremony to counteract effects of evil upon a child, the burning of esfand is required. Esfand seeds were also used to produce an invisible ink. The process involved pounding the seeds before soaking them in water for two days. The juice thereafter functioned as an invisible ink when written on paper. In order to read it, the paper is brought close to a flame and the heat makes the writing visible. See the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* entry on esfand for a more detailed discussion of esfand and associated cultural phenomena.

¹²⁵ This line is taken from the Basil Bunting ode “Nothing” in *The Collected Poems of Basil Bunting* (41).

¹²⁶ The final full page of *Ruby* ends with a line, indeed the final line, of Peter Jaeger’s poetic sequence *Prop* (2007). As with *Ruby*, the poems of *Prop* express the temporary, impermanent character of perception by re-negotiating the traditional, voice-based lyric. Stylistically, *Prop* is a major influence on *Ruby*, with Jaeger making use of collage as well as dramatic shifts in syntax and narrative to create an exploration of the nature of consciousness within language itself. As Chris Hamilton-Emery observes in his web review of *Prop*, it is “a book written in motion, and its quick changes in tone and imagery present the dynamism and impermanence of the world”. It is in this impermanence that *Ruby* finds its purpose and place in the world.

Chapter Four:

Forging Omar Khayyam

When Basil Bunting praises Omar Pound's *Arabic & Persian Poems* for its desire to re-engage with Middle Eastern poetry, and for its rejection of adherence to representational accuracy, Bunting is using these acclamations as a rallying call. He points out that by producing something that is necessarily newer and more familiar from an older text, we are at the same time emancipating ourselves from our established prejudices and predispositions. We can introduce Western literary and contemporary cultural allusions that often parallel Persian and Arabic contexts found in the original works and avoid reinforcing Orientalist pre-conceptions. We can even merge and adapt existing poems to create new perspectives that connect Persian and English literature and language in neoteric, provocative and playful ways. Critically, however, as Steve McCaffery and bpNichol put it in *Rational Geomancy*, the translation should be a "creative endeavour in its own right" (32). As Kent Johnson describes it in his essay "Imitation, Traduction, Fiction, Response," published in *Jacket* magazine (2008):

Any poem is the raw material for forging experiments in translation [...]

A solid, so called accurate translation may be the first step towards even better traductions, i.e., imaginative transformations that may well extend energies of the original, otherwise lost in more fundamentalist attempts to carry across, as Benjamin would have it, an 'inessential meaning' (1).

In this respect, *Ruby* is my answer to Bunting's rallying call: a (hopefully) imaginative transformation of the original *Rubaiyat*, re-connecting with something older and less familiar whilst at the same time forging new experiments in translation.

One immediate implication of this kind of “imaginative transformation” is that the “conventional” link between the original and new texts, the transfer of meaning is lost. Rather than seeking representational fidelity, *Ruby* is therefore partly reliant on an assertion of a deeper, spiritual connection between cultural traditions through the sharing of rhythmic sounds. This process of sharing sounds operates in relation to patterns of breathing and its articulation on the page through line-breaks. Reflecting some of the poetics of Charles Olson as he describes them in *Projective Verse*, I ensure that *Ruby* works on the level of sound as well as meaning, and that its lines are breath-conditioned. In an interview for *The Poetry Foundation* webpage on Olson, Robert Creeley argues that “what [Olson] is trying to say is that the heart is the basis not only of rhythm, but it is the base measure of rhythms for all men ... when he says ‘the heart by way of the breath to the line’ he is trying to say that it is in the line that basic rhythmic scoring takes place.” These “rhythms for all” universalise the verse in *Ruby* because once we strip away the representational meanings of English, Persian and Arabic – we all breathe in the same way. In this stanza towards the end of Part Three, I stop in the line halfway through phrases and even cut through a word, in order to emphasise the importance of the underlying breath:

listen
to where the breath sto
we fill it with shards
hardened . candied
an old jug is a (66).

As Olson puts it, ‘it is from the union of the mind and the ear that the syllable is born. But the syllable is only the first child of verse [...] The other child is the LINE [...] And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath’ (2). I would argue, however, that the

interruptive nature of *Ruby* suggests that there is a third child in verse – a disruptive toddler at play within the line: “we . break . many . times . between . places and times” (73). I use this ‘broken’ style and unexpected language to unlock the original text from shackles of translational fidelity. As I have discussed already, the ‘diminished I’ is central to my translation, as is my resolute determination to disrupt and defamiliarise through the language, sounds and rhythms of *Ruby*. Ultimately my goal is to expose the “fragments . make it easier . to see / the past . between us” (98).

The second implication of this notion of “imaginative transformation” concerns this same treatment of space and time. In *Projective Verse*, Olson rejects conventional linear approaches to space and time. He describes a collapse of space and time to a single point, a one dimensional focal point of energy or punctum, from which the process of writing a poem can begin.^a As Michael Kindellan described it in his discussion of literalism at the Olson International Conference at the University of Kent (2010), Olson promotes the manifestation of space-time, the atomic reduction of it, to “dig one thing or place” (2). I would argue that creative translation is just as relevant for this process as any other creative act. As with Benjamin's portrayal of *The Task of the Translator*, creative translation cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has to come to a stop (14).^b As Omar Pound points out in an interview in the online magazine *Artful Dodge* in 2002, for poetry to exist at all, it needs to activate the existing cultural landscape, rather like light stimulating a photoelectric cell:

I suppose what I really want to say is that great poetry must have great vision. Whether you like the vision or not has nothing to do with it.

Poetry is like photoelectric cells that only function when they're aimed towards the light. If you think of a poem as being a photoelectric cell,

reporting most vigorously when directed on a journey towards the light
you know you're not going to get much reaction if you point it down a
well.

In *Ruby*, I take this focus on the “smallest particle of all” one step further by giving it a distinctive notation, a symbol that I call the “punctum.” Roland Barthes uses the term “punctum” in his book *Camera Lucida* (1980) specifically in terms of emotional effects of certain photographs. Barthes develops the twin concepts of *studium* and *punctum*: *studium* denoting the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph, *punctum* denoting the wounding, personally touching detail which may potentially make the viewer take notice or pause, and establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within the photograph (38).^c In *Ruby*, I re-apply the principles of Barthes’ notion to my own poetics – the moment of intense connection through detail is transferred to pauses between words of emotional significance. I give the *punctum* a specific notation through the use of a dot placed equidistantly between words – a controlled but pregnant pause. This offers a focal point, a return to nothing, from which I build a revitalised something new. The *punctum* appears throughout *Ruby* from the first line of the first rubai onwards: “awake . midday” (31). The *punctum* acts as an off-key underscore to *Ruby*, a potential antidote to excessive musicality or an over-romanticisation of lyrical poetry. In other words the lyric is diminished or deliberately weakened by the punctum – without them there would be less space and time for the defamiliarisation that helps *Ruby* rid itself of Orientalist pretensions.

Another consequence of removing original meanings from *Ruby* is the more overt manifestation of the notion of translation as “the body.” In re-interpreted texts that have had their representational meaning deliberately stripped from them, the writing is in one sense naked, at least in the sphere of translation. In its nakedness, the material

body of the source text is more apparent, inner workings more open to poetic interpretation. For men like Omar Khayyam, such analogies would not have seemed strange; Khayyam himself wrote a number of treatises on astronomy, algebra and anatomy.^d Khayyam's philosophical writing makes strong parallels between the physical body and the spiritual and poetic body. It is easy to see many of his works as a poetic embodiment, an existential presence, even as a being in its own right. Khayyam, for instance, talks of the life and death of the poem, and in common with Samarqandi wrote eulogies to poetic texts as though they were old friends with distinct physical and emotional characteristics.^e This kind of re-imagining of the poem as a corporeal entity echoes the Olsonian concept of "Proprioception." In his essay of the same name (1965), Olson promotes the notion of proprioception, which can be defined as perception of the body, its parts in relation to its whole, and its placement in space (2). Indeed Olson is interested in the fingertips in relation to the soul within. For instance, he wonders in "Human Universe" whether "the fingertips are not very knowing knots in their own rights, like little brains, like photo-electric cells" (159). Ultimately, *Ruby*, as an act of translation, is a full exposition of a bodily link that spans both the inner and outer world. On the one hand, there is the soul, the brain, the inner things, and on the other there is the skin, the ever-changing outer reality, that seeks to express the complexities of that inner soul. In all this, as the translator, I am the fingertips, and like Olson's photo-electric cells, I seek to illuminate some aspect or other of the original text:

naked bodies . to finger tips

inside and outside

writing . moving

having writ

move on (33)

Taking a cue from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the body in *Ruby* is not the external tool of an inner sovereign mental ego, but an organism within which the ego, or mind, plays a subordinate role. I also assert that this body connects with a super-organism, a single connecting entity, "the uni verse" (76), through which we can understand our place in the world. Bakhtin argues in *Rabelais and His World* that the body, particularly grotesque or realistic depictions of it such as in Rabelais' *Gargantua*, is a celebration of the cycle of life: the grotesque body is a comic figure of profound ambivalence: its positive meaning is linked to birth and renewal and its negative meaning is linked to death and decay (357). In *Ruby*, as in *Gargantua*, the carnivalesque signifies a break with fixed and prescribed poetic narratives:

carnivals end it
up in the clouds they sigh
we are all people
no special story
just you and wine and
our bodies (126)

My rejection of the desire for a single narrative liberates the poetry: the body can breathe, constantly being revived by the reader's own perceptions and experiences. The assumptions of dominant styles or forms are subverted and rendered powerless by applying a playful but well-meaning sort of chaos, which means we have as I mention a little earlier in *Ruby* "nowhere to go and a lifetime to re-invent" (98).

Perhaps the most significant re-invention in *Ruby* is of Omar Khayyam himself. I forge him, both in the sense of constructing him and falsifying him, as a modern-day *Ashik*, a twenty-first century troubadour. The Omar Khayyam of *Ruby* is a nomad, travelling minstrel or fool, an outsider existing on the fringes of the political and

cultural establishment. He operates beyond the jurisdiction of the laws of the mainstream, beyond even its linguistic rules. He is brave enough to travel into the lawless territories between linguistic and literary traditions and through his folly he offers the reader access to other worlds:

but we're still bounded
what he comes from
is words to
make us
new (49)

In "Unsealing ('the old new language')" (1988) Derrida argues that writers are entitled to "invent, break new paths" by journeying along old ones, even if their meanings are unreliable or manufactured (*Points* 17). This is why I end *Ruby* in the way I do, with a single line that says how *Ruby* came to be what it is – that it is "forged old and new . for ruby . for you" (127).

NOTES

^a Ian Davidson also reflects on this relationship between space and time in poetry. In *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* Davidson focuses in particular on the way the form and content of modern and contemporary poetry have engaged with the process of globalisation and with theories of space and specialisation. In "Space, Place and Identity," he examines the way in which spatial theory can support new readings of relationships between poetry and identity, as the movement of people around the world

increases and communities become increasingly diverse (*Ideas of Space* 89-121). *Ruby* is in a sense an example of this expansion in movement and diversity, and echoes my own notion of the poet-translator as a modern-day *Ashik*, building bridges between poetic identities.

^b For more on the implications of Benjamin's "The Task of The Translator" on this topic, see the essay "Translation as Simulacrum" by John Johnston in *Rethinking translation: discourse, subjectivity, ideology* (1992).

^c Strictly speaking Barthes' *punctum* is unintentional. As Michael Fried points out in his essay "Barthes' Punctum" in *Critical Enquiry* (2005), the experience of the punctum lives or dies for Barthes according to the absence or presence of intentionality on the part of the photographer or viewer; if there is visible intention, there is no punctum (38). That the punctum can exist only in the absence of intention is consistent, Fried claims, with his distinction between "seeing" and "being shown." Yet Fried also points out that the punctum is above all else "anti-theatrical" in the sense that we see it for ourselves without any meaning being deliberately assigned to it. This later characteristic is also true of my punctum: the space it occupies is a void – an understated haven between the more theatrical sounds and rhythms that sit either side of it.

^d See Razavi (18-39), for the connections between the different strands in Khayyam's intellectual activity including his philosophical treatises.

^e *Ibid.*, (34-35), for a more detailed discussion on Khayyam's eulogic poetry.

Appendix

Ruby vs. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Table of Comparison

In the table below, the rubais of *Ruby* are shown in order of appearance in this volume. They are compared with the quatrains of FitzGerald's first edition of *The Rubaiyat*, and the Whinfield translation, both of which I use as key points of reference in my work; see note 10 (134). I have also included references to the Persian manuscripts in which each rubai appears, as a fifth column in the table. I use the collected *Winfield Edition* of these manuscripts as my source text for the original Persian language poems. For a more detailed explanation of the variations by manuscript, see Jos Couman's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam: An Updated Bibliography* (29-33).

The final column of the table indicates the specific Persian manuscripts in which the poems appear an abbreviated code:

A is the Asiatic Society Manuscript, found in Bengal by Edward Cowell.

B is the Bodleian Library Manuscript, aka the *Ouseley Manuscript*.

C is the *Calcutta Manuscript*, also found by Cowell, in the city of that name.

H is the *Haft Iqlam*, written by Amin Ahmad Razi, which contains several quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyam.

I is the *India Office Manuscript No. 2420*.

J is the *India Office Manuscript No. 2486*.

L is the *Lucknow Manuscript*, discovered in 1878.

M is the *Marsad ul 'Ibad*, written by Najmu-d-Din Abu Bakri Razi, which contains several quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyam.

N is the manuscript used by French translator Jean Baptiste Nicolas.

<i>Ruby</i>	FitzGerald	Whinfield	Persian Manuscripts
1	1	233	ACIJL
2	49	336	BLN
3	57	310	ACNI
4	40	221	ACIL
5	58	52	ACILN
6	27	376	ACILN
7	91	318	ACIJLN
8	56	216	BL
9	n/a	508	M
10	3	81	N
11	84	377	LN
12	109	257	BLN
13	81	408	ABCILN
14	113	7	ABCIJLN
15	67	386	BL
16	6	119	ACIJL
17	70	258	ACIJLN
18	29	264	ACIJLN
19	37	20	LN
20	74	114	BL
21	108	217	ABCIJL
22	31	26	ACIJLN
23	33	303	ACIJL
24	50	254	ACIJL
25	99	330	ABCIJLN
26	114	234	B
27	28	151	ACILN
28	26	341	LN
29	41	386	BL
30	18	70	ACIJLN
31	2	1	ACIJLN
32	78	401	ACIJL
33	83	87	ACILN
34	86	339	LN
35	15	298	ACIJLN
36	7	425	ACIJL
37	8	134	ABCIJLN
38	10	455	ACIJLN
39	n/a	507	B
40	98	193	ACIJHLN
41	22	396	ABCIJLN
42	23	312	ACIJLN
43	19	72	ACIJLN
44	20	277	ACLN

<i>Ruby</i>	Fitzgerald	Whinfield	Persian Manuscripts
45	107	155	A C I L N
46	111	240	A C I J L N
47	82	489	A B C I L
48	12	79	B N
49	112	379	A C I J L N
50	4	116	B
51	43	44	A C I J L N
52	46	304	A B C I J L N
53	87	265	L N
54	47	86	L N
55	44	237	A C I L
56	39	252	A B C I J L N
57	38	32	A B C I J L N
58	48	196	A C I N
59	101	6	A C I J L N
60	13	108	A B C I J L
61	96	42	A B C I J N
62	100	218	B
63	104	332	B L N
64	n/a	197	A B C H I L N
65	106	208	A B C I L N
66	64	247	N
67	34	47	A B C I J L N
68	30	133	L N
69	45	242	A C I J L N
70	79	35	A B C I J L N
71	80	4	A C I J L N
72	n/a	369	L N
73	88	398	L N
74	105	165	A B C I L N
75	55	67	A C I J L N
76	51	194	A C I J L N
77	25	73	A C I J L N
78	110	342	L N
79	24	219	A C I L
80	21	104	A B L
81	89	102	N
82	17	175	A B C I J L N
83	60	161	N
84	90	100	A C I L N
85	14	411	B L N
86	65	475	A C I J L N
87	59	254	A C I J L
88	71	209	A C I J L N

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